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## LIFE COMES TO SEATHORPE

*By the same Author*

THE HANDSOME LANGLEYS

LIFE COMES TO  
SEATHORPE

*A Novel*

BY

NEIL BELL



EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE  
LONDON

*To*  
TOM HAINES  
WHO GENEROUSLY PUT HIS EXPERT  
KNOWLEDGE AT MY SERVICE

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## *Chapter One*

### FATHER AND SON

UNTIL he was approaching the thirties life had run on pleasant if perhaps unexciting lines for Warren Passmore. He lived with his widowed mother at Breford, Sussex, in a large house, *Southways*, on the fringe of the town overlooking the golf links. He was very comfortably off and passed his time agreeably riding, golfing, fishing, or yachting in his ten-tonner *Ariadne* which he kept at Merhaven. As far back as his memory went life had always dealt him an attractive hand: deals he excusably came to look upon as the natural order of things. At eleven he had gone to the famous St. Bede's preparatory school. Warren was happy there. The school kept a good table. He was very good at games; was of a gregarious disposition; and sufficiently intelligent to be able to do well in class, without more attention to work than was traditionally permissible. At fourteen he had gone to Harborne, which, if not, unlike St. Bede's, easily first of its kind, was prepared to challenge Eton and Harrow for that supremacy. His four and a half years there were also happy ones, if marked by no outstanding performances in the athletic or academic fields. He was by now an exceedingly well built and personable, even comely, young man, and the next three years, of which he spent in all about seven hundred days at Magdalen College, Oxford, were not niggardly in their bestowal of pleasures sensuous and sensual. He saw no purpose in reading for a degree and came down without one. He was now twenty-two; his father had recently died. It seemed to him that he might do worse than spend the next year or two with his mother at *Southways* (now his) before deciding what he proposed to do with himself and with life. There was no hurry. Even on the scriptural assumption (which, he understood, modern medical science had now rendered a modest one) half a century lay before him. A long while. And he had a long purse and good health. There was

no hurry at all. For a while he would sit back and anticipatively savour the future.

Two years had slipped smoothly and pleasantly by when a mild restlessness, a vague and faint dissatisfaction, intruded into his comfortable days. A touch of liver perhaps. He was not getting enough exercise; not enough for a man who ate and drank as he did; something to do with metabolism, he believed. So he played two rounds a day instead of one, and one of them with Kneller, the professional, who could really extend him. But the mental, or spiritual, malaise did not respond to treatment. He did not ask himself whether it was the right treatment. He assumed the trouble was liver; it was the traditional English trouble of men of leisure. What did Bacon say about this troublesome organ? That riding was the best specific. Or was it riding for the stone and reins, according to my lord Verulam? Certainly someone prescribed with authority riding for the liver. And he had undoubtedly been rather neglecting his riding of late. He must find more time for it and be regular; make it a regime. He did so, and the mild restlessness, the vague dissatisfaction, left him. But the riding worked the cure in only the most indirect fashion.

Breford Head is some two hundred feet high. Away to the east, sheer and chalk-white, loom the Seven Sisters. Inland for many square miles stretch the Downs. And it was over these Downs that daily, in rigorous obedience to the regime, he cantered and galloped. One morning as he cantered from the Head inland he caught sight of a galloping horse about half a mile away. Its rider was a woman, and for a moment he did not perceive that it had bolted. It was making for the Head. He hesitated. Excitement and drama in life he was ready enough to welcome, but this had a revolting air of melodrama about it. And in any case she would probably be all right. Why intrude? And perhaps look and certainly feel a fool. The horse was getting nearer the Head. He tossed up mentally and set off at a gallop to intercept it. Damn women! Why did they mess about with horses if they couldn't control them?

He headed the horse off and presently drew alongside and pulled it up. Its rider was whitefaced and frightened, but car-

ried the affair off well, and in a while, as their horses walked slowly towards Cuckmere Haven, they fell into conversation; at first, on her part, before she had recovered complete control of her nerves, with a rather spasmodic brightness; but long before they had reached the Haven they were talking easily and unaffectedly. This was her first visit to Breford; she had arrived only the previous afternoon and was staying with her uncle, Dr. Raymond; and it was no hindrance to their establishment of a closer footing that Dr. Raymond was Mrs. Passmore's physician and on friendly enough terms with Warren to play golf with him fairly often. It was two hours later when they said goodbye and arranged to go riding on the morrow. As he cantered home he wondered if her beauty, her charm, and the extraordinary attraction she had for him, were not due to the emotionally exciting manner of their coming together; and he was prepared for disillusionment upon the morrow. But the morrow brought no disillusionment; nor all the other morrows of her long holiday. When at its end she returned to her home in London they were already engaged, and in the late autumn were married at St. George's, Hanover Square.

They had been married three years and had a two-year-old son when in 1914 the War broke out. It was some time before Warren felt called upon to take any part in the War except a vicarious one. Had he not, while at Oxford, spoken in the Union against war, all war, any war? This rushing to the colours seemed to him illogical, stupid, the easy way of the man who refused to think for himself; and, often enough, the refuge of the man who was afraid not to join. He felt that he was taking up a perfectly sound position. A year later he was not so sure. By the end of 1916 he was in France, a lieutenant in the 2nd Essex Regiment. He was in several minor engagements on the Somme during the unprecedented weather of the following January and February, when the temperature was frequently 20 degrees below zero. Early in March a spate of casualties brought him his captaincy, and a month later he was wounded in the leg and evacuated to England, where, after three months in hospital, he spent a very happy two months' leave at Breford with Sylvia, his mother, and four-year-old Mark. In October he rejoined his

regiment, which was floundering in the mud of Passchendaele.

About the middle of March the next year he had a brief leave in Paris, and on his way back to his regiment was delayed for twenty-four hours at Arras. A mile or so along the Arras-Cambrai road, towards the front, were the ruins of a small village, Tilloy. At Tilloy was a camp whose Commandant was Captain Lucas Reeves, who had been at Magdalen with Warren. They had not been great friends; no more, indeed, than on mildly amicable terms; but in war that is more than enough to justify a call and to count upon a warm welcome. Warren rode over to the camp the next morning on a bicycle, lent reluctantly by the Town Major of Arras, and found Captain Reeves in, but just off to inspect some billets by Monchey, which was two miles nearer the line and under machine-gun fire from the enemy.

They decided to walk. It was a pleasant morning, warm as summer. It was much quicker to keep to the road, and the Boche usually kept such regular hours in the matter of shelling that at that time in the day the road was safe enough. But that morning the Boche did not keep to his timetable, and as the two men strolled along in the sunshine smoking contentedly and chatting a little desultorily a high-velocity shell hit the road about ten yards ahead of them. It outdistanced the scream of its coming so that they had no warning. Warren was never able afterwards to remember its explosion: a sudden black curtain fell over him. That is no mere figure of speech. His sight was gone; his back so badly injured that his legs were useless. Captain Reeves was killed instantly.

Sylvia summoned up what fortitude she could discover to minister to this piece of human wreckage. Mrs. Passmore, who might have been a staff to her hand, unhappily died in the influenza epidemic at the end of the War. The affair to six-year-old Mark was such an overthrowing of his world that it left indelible memories. His big, handsome father had gone out to war very gallant and swagger in his smart officer's uniform and Sam Browne belt (so different from the Tommies), and the house had seemed very empty without him. But there had been letters, and then he had been wounded, and how exciting that was! And then he had been at home

for two long months, and what a lovely time Mark had had with Mummy and Daddy! It was beautiful weather and they did something every day, and what with bathing and yachting and riding and picnicking it was the loveliest holiday Mark had ever had. And then Daddy had put on his uniform again (and now with a medal ribbon for doing something brave), and looked bigger and more handsome and gallant than ever. And away he had gone to the War again, where he would win more medals and perhaps get another wound (not a bad or hurting one), and then they'd all have another lovely holiday together. But Daddy had not come back again. Instead there had returned to *Southways* a man with a scarred face and blinded eyes; a man who had to be wheeled about in a chair; a chair he never got out of except to be put to bed. So he couldn't play any more or swim or ride with Mark and Mummy or take them out in *Ariadne*. For a time, just a short time, he didn't seem as if he were Daddy at all; his face was so different; and his smile; even his voice was not the same; it was more like Dr. Raymond's, and he was a very old man.

Only a few weeks after the signing of the Peace Treaty Sir Herbert Trent brought his converted Brixham trawler *Sally* into Merhaven for repairs. Merhaven was Hobson's choice. *Sally* had been caught in one of the summer storms which occasionally blow up in those waters in July. Their onset is sudden and heralded only to the most experienced eye; their violence terrific; their duration brief. No one builds better trawlers than Brixham did in its heyday, and *Sally* dated from those prosperous times. She weathered the storm, but had to run for it, and, badly knocked about, was glad to make any port. And so she came to Merhaven.

Before the War Sir Herbert often put into Merhaven, and had come to know Warren. In the summer he was a temporary member of the Breford and Merhaven Yacht Club, and when he was in Breford usually lunched at *Southways* and occasionally dined there. Warren liked Trent; so, when later she came to know him, did Sylvia. Trent during the War had served in the Navy and had not been in home waters from 1916 until he returned to civilian life. *Sally's* repairs being likely to take some days, Trent, who had an

open invitation to stay at *Southways*, thought he could not do better than look up Warren and Sylvia and charming old Mrs. Passmore. He had not had news of them for several years; quite three it must be.

He was shocked and wished he had not come. But Sylvia made him so welcome, and Warren was so pathetically pleased to have him there to talk to, and young Mark was such a friendly little chap, that *Sally's* repairs dragged out to over a fortnight. And in early September Trent again put into Merhaven and stayed at *Southways* a month. And before leaving he was given the warmest invitation for Christmas, and came about the middle of December, remaining till almost the end of January. Of course, Mark wanted to go to London to see the shops and the bazaars and to pay his annual visits to Peter Pan and to the pantomimes. And so there were frequent visits to London with Mark and Sylvia: and how Warren enjoyed hearing it all when they returned! And occasionally Trent and Sylvia went without Mark, when they were going to the theatre or a dance. It was a lovely holiday for Mark; almost as fine as those other holidays before Daddy had to sit in his invalid chair.

Much of the following summer Trent spent at *Southways*. He was, however, not there when early one August morning Sylvia knocked at the door of Warren's bedroom before his manservant Roberts had got him up. "I want to talk to you," she said quietly.

He nodded and smiled. "I'll ring through and say I'm not to be disturbed for half an hour. That be long enough, darling?"

"Yes," she said.

Presently he put down the house telephone and lay back on his pillow. His eyes looked straight at her. They were uninjured, bright and clear. It was difficult to believe they were sightless. She found their blind inquisition insupportable; looked away; moved uneasily in her chair.

"Are you finding it hard to say, darling?" he said suddenly. "Don't let it distress you. When are you going?"

"O Warren!"

"Did you think I didn't know? None so—so percipient as those who can't see."

She did not know what to say. She began to say haltingly the worn, dreary things that are said; but he stopped her, putting out a hand. "No," he said quietly, "that isn't how it is, my dear. But why discuss it? I don't want to. It shall all be arranged as soon as possible."

"There is Mark."

"Yes, there is Mark. He is very fond of you, Sylvia, and he likes Herbert."

"And he is very fond of you."

"Is he?" With a gesture of his hands. "Can a boy be fond of this?"

"You know he is fond of you. He idolises you."

"Let's keep to facts. What are we going to do about him? What is best for him?"

"Can't we leave it to him to choose?"

"A boy of seven? When we do not know ourselves? Tossing up for it would be less unfair."

"But it isn't a complete break, Warren. And it isn't an irrevocable decision. Whoever he lives with he would spend part of the year with the other."

"It is the one he lives with who will count most in his life. Are we going to push the decision on to him?"

"But what else can we do but let him choose? Anything else would be cruel."

"These breaks are rough on children."

"I know, Warren."

"And bad for them. Nothing is so necessary to a child as a normal family life. If there were any possibility of my marrying again I would have him. As it is, it will be best, I think, if he comes to you. Herbert is really fond of him?"

"I am sure he is. But you may marry again."

"Would you marry me?"

"If—if I loved you."

"How could you love me? Do women fall in love with blind cripples? Let's stick to things as they are and not pretend about life and human beings. Well, then, it's settled?"

"No, Warren. Please. I couldn't bear the thought that Mark might be unhappy with us because—because of you."

"Where are you going to live?"

"At Brixham. For a year or so at least. Later we shall go abroad."

"Brixham is a good place for a boy. He could be happy there. Don't let us sentimentalise about Mark. Children are capable of only a limited amount of affection. Provided they are well fed and cared for, with plenty of opportunities for games and fun and plenty of playfellows of their own age, I imagine they could very well dispense altogether with the society of adults, with even the fondest mother and father. It would probably be the ideal life for them. Better even than a normal family life."

"I don't believe it, Warren. I would rather Mark was left to choose."

"And I am to ask him?"

"It—it would come better from you."

"Very well, Sylvia. It is not going to be easy. I think I'll have my breakfast here this morning."

It was not easy. Mark, summoned to his father's chairside on the bedroom verandah later in the morning, could not understand, and asked questions it was difficult to answer. He had always been encouraged to ask questions, and his father and mother and his governess always answered them, and answered them honestly.

"But why is Mummy going away?"

"She is going to live with Uncle Herbert."

"At Brixham?"

"Yes. It's a jolly place."

"But aren't you coming?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well," with a smile, "because I'm staying here."

His father could feel his troubled bewilderment; knew the boy was almost out of his depth yet was not completely unaware of what was being implied, although he could not frame the question which would demand the whole truth. Should he tell him everything? Say to him: 'Your mother is going to marry Uncle Herbert, and in future will be his wife and not mine?' He did not feel he could make so full an avowal; that it would be right to make it to a child of such tender years; unless the probing question forced it out of him.

For that avowal would inevitably have been met with another 'Why?' and what could he say to that? And so he went on, speaking lightly and smiling: "Mummy and Uncle Herbert will be living at Brixham, and I shall be living here. Now we thought that perhaps you would rather live at Brixham than here."

"Do you mean leave Miss Beeding?"

"O no. She could go with you if she wished. Or you could have another governess. And then you could come and spend your holidays here. All of them if you liked."

There was a long silence. Mark was struggling to work things out. But it was too difficult. He gave it up. He began to cry.

His father put an arm round him. "What are you crying for, you chump!"

"I—I don't want to go, Daddy," with a sob.

"Well, nobody's going to make you go. So you can stay here with me and Miss Beeding and spend your holidays at Brixham. You'll like that?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Well, trot along now. And go and wash your face. You mustn't let Mummy see you've been crying. And, Mark. Mark, are you there?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"If ever you want to change you can do so. You know what I mean: go to live at Brixham with Mummy and Uncle Herbert and come to Breford for your holidays."

"I shan't want to, Daddy."

"All right, my boy." He thought Mark had gone and sighed. And then he heard his footsteps approaching, felt his arms round his neck and his lips on his cheeks. His arm tightened momentarily around him, and then he tickled his ribs and said with mock sternness, "Here! men don't kiss. Cut along now and tell Roberts I want to go to the bank."

For the next three years the arrangement held without further discussion. Mark spent from May to the end of August at Brixham; the rest of the year he lived at *Southways*. When he was nine Miss Beeding gave place to a Mr. Corless, a young man in the late twenties with whom he quickly became on the best of terms. It was a change for the

better in every respect. Admirable governess as Miss Beeding was, Mark was beginning to have a vague feeling of hostility against feminine tutelage. And outside lessons Miss Beeding was no good at all from a boy's point of view: she couldn't do things. But matters were very different with Mr. Corless. He couldn't be played up as Miss Beeding had been: he made it quite clear from the first day that he wouldn't stand any nonsense, and Mark, not too pleased at first, liked him all the better for it. Even as a teacher he was superior to Miss Beeding. Or was from Mark's point of view, for he had an engaging habit of illustrating a point by stories of his own adventures; and he had been all over the world and done the most astonishing things. Mark was not to know that many of Mr. Corless's most thrilling exploits were apocryphal. But it was outside the classroom that Mr. Corless so outshone Miss Beeding. He could do things; all sorts of things, almost everything. He could ride, swim, fish, jump, box, and handle any sailing craft from a five-tonner to the *Cutty Sark* herself, as he boasted. Not that Mark thought it boasting; merely a statement of fact. And so the old happy days came again. Mr. Corless went with him to Brixham (for lessons could not be neglected through the entire summer), and what times they had there!

But when Mark was eleven a decision had again to be taken, and again it was left to him to choose. Sir Herbert and Lady Trent had decided to spend the next three or four years in travel, and their plan embraced a fairly thorough quartering of the globe. What experience could be more stimulating and truly educative than this for a boy of Mark's impressionable age? His mother suggested that he could accompany them, and his father had no objections to offer, considering it, indeed, a most admirable proposal. Mark had long known what was the association of his mother and Uncle Herbert, for it was but a very short time after their marriage that his questions forced his father to explanation. The explanation did not surprise him; he felt that he had known it all along; momentarily he hovered upon the brink of a more intimate question, but drew back, for he felt that he knew the answer to that as well. His mother's suggestion tempted him even more strongly than was to be expected, for he had a bent for

geography and was fascinated by tales of exploration and of the peoples of other lands. To spend three or four years living in great ships and seeing all the countries of the world was an enchanting prospect. And the alternative was not to stay with Father at *Southways*, with Mr. Corless as teacher and boon companion. If that had been the alternative he would not have hesitated, or not for long. But Father had decided it was time he rubbed shoulders with his contemporaries, and so he would go to St. Bede's and Mr. Corless would seek another pupil. And no more Brixham holidays. All his holidays would have to be spent at *Southways*, and he'd have to make his own fun. Weighed in the balance against that magic carpet, it seemed a dull prospect. What boy could possibly hesitate? Mark hesitated. If he fought out grim secret battles there was no sign of them in his demeanour. And then he announced his decision: he would go to St. Bede's. And in September, 1923, he went there.

It was in the November of that first term that he received the letter. He would have written it *The Letter*, for such it was always to be in his memory and doubtless in his father's too. It was a short letter and he soon knew it by heart.

SOUTHWAYS,  
BREFORD,  
SUSSEX.  
Nov. 18, 1923.

MY DEAR MARK,

*I can see. Not these words I am writing to you, but I can see the paper, a white blur in front of me and moving over it a darker blur which is my hand. I can see the daylight come and watch it go, and every day I can see a little more; the daylight comes more brightly. This has not happened suddenly. It has been going on for weeks: ever since, in fact, I shouted to Roberts one night early in October (it was Friday the fifth: I am not likely to forget it), "Did you flash a torch across my eyes?" and he said he had, by accident. "Do it again," I said, and once more I noticed the faint red blur. "Again," I said, "again, again." And each time I saw the red blur. I did not sleep at all that night. I was waiting for the daylight. And when it came I saw it, a faint lightening of the*

darkness all about me. During the next few days Doctor Hayter came from London to see me, and Dr. Tait from Edinburgh, and a week later Professor Reinstet from Berlin. there are times when it is a boon to be rich. They all told me the same: my sight was returning. It would be a slow process, but before another year, they said, I should be seeing quite well and might even one day regain my full sight.

Why have I waited more than a month before telling you? I wasn't certain. Despite the assurances of these great ophthalmic surgeons, I could not believe it. And there were days when I could not feel sure that I was really distinguishing light from darkness; and so I preferred to wait. Now I am certain. I can see this paper as a white blur; but as something a little more than a blur; a shape; a definite white shape; and my moving hand, too, is a shape, a dark shape. So are people's bodies; and their faces are not quite so dark. And I can see buildings and animals and vehicles. Yesterday in my chair I was in the High Street. The sun was shining brilliantly, and Roberts said something to me, and I turned and looked up at him, and in the pink blur of his face I saw, I thought I saw—no! I know I saw, a vague shadowy nose, the dark gape of a mouth. That is all for now, my dear boy. When you come home for Christmas I shall be able to see your face, if not your freckles. All here send you their greetings and best regards. With love.

FATHER.

That Christmas holiday was a memorable one for father and son. Mark took over the charge of his father's chair, and daily in the garden, about the lawns, out in the roads, and into the town itself, he wheeled him. And everywhere they went, with the same objects as guides, they conducted regular tests. Mark would suddenly begin counting his paces and then, stopping the chair, would say, "Now, Father, almost straight ahead, but a little to the right, what can you see?"

"A red gate."

"You saw that yesterday."

"Well, I can't see any more to-day."

"Yes, you can; you're not trying. How many railings has it?"

"Why, *you* can't see that."

"Silly. I can see where the paint's peeled off. Try."

"Well," craning forward and peering—"oh, well, no! I can't see."

"You can. How many?"

"Er—seven—no, eight."

"Of course. I told you so."

Again Mark would say, "What's this coming along the road?"

"A human being."

"Male or female?"

"You can't tell these days; but it's wearing trousers." A pause. "By jove! it's a woman."

After she had passed Mark would say, "Did you think she was pretty?" to which his father would reply, with a grimace, "I can't tell the pretty from the ugly yet. Was she?"

"Not bad."

By the next summer holidays his sight was completely restored, nearly a year in advance of his doctors' most optimistic expectations, as is by no means infrequently the way of such restorations.

But by now another seeming miracle was happening and one whose manifesting was only just beginning to be suspected by himself: life was returning to his legs. This was to be no such an unmixed joy as the return of his sight, for as life crept back slowly along the old tracks, revivifying the nerves, replenishing bloodvessels, renewing and strengthening partly atrophied muscles, the pain of that progression was at times so sharp and so prolonged that it demanded every ounce of his fortitude and stoicism. But, as if in recompense for these torments, and aided, perhaps, by his masseurs, improvement was more marked and even more rapid than it had been with his sight; and by the following Christmas he could walk with the aid only of a stick. By that summer he could manage nine holes; could ride and swim again; and had taken *Ariadne* as far as Dover in a bucking sea.

That September Mark began his first term at Harborne, and by the time he was fifteen his father was so completely restored to health that but for some facial scars he was physically as good a man as the Captain Passmore who had

set off on that bright March morning to walk along the Arras-Cambrai road with his friend Captain Lucas Reeves.

A few months before his sixteenth birthday Mark was made a house prefect and not many months later a school prefect. Such grandeurs, his father said chaffingly, merited some recognition, and he suggested they should spend the summer holidays touring France, taking the larger of the two cars, a Bentley. Mark drove well, but although he looked quite eighteen and was a big fellow, his father would not allow him to drive until he reached the legal age. But in France the restriction did not apply, and it was by no means, in anticipation, the least exciting part of the holiday to Mark that he would have his turn at the wheel of the big Bentley. The holiday to his father was something in the nature of a pilgrimage; he wanted to renew old associations, and especially those of the War. Often in the years of darkness and helplessness he had gone over old trails in France time and again in the only way he believed would ever be possible to him. And now, the miracles having happened, he was eager to make real those wanderings of reverie.

By mid-August Warren had made all his pilgrimages and renewed many acquaintanceships and friendships and was ready to turn south. They proceeded leisurely and were in Bordeaux by the 25th, spending the rest of the month at the little seaside resort of Arcachon. They were undecided when they resumed their itinerary whether to go to Lourdes before they went on into Spain or to visit Lourdes on their return. Mark tossed a coin for it, and they missed Spain altogether on that occasion.

When they went in to dinner at their hotel on the evening of their arrival a man of late middle age who was sitting at an adjacent table looked up from his menu, smiled, and said, "And what brings *you* to Lourdes, Passmore? Or is it your ghost? Or are you one of the miracles?"

It was Colonel Shelley, Warren's old C.O., and with him was an astonishingly pretty young woman, his daughter Vivien. Vivien was twenty-four; young enough for Mark to fall in love with her (which he did) and not too young for his father to follow suit: or it may be he led. The rest of the holiday they spent with the Shelleys, returning with them to

England at the end of September. And at the beginning of December Mark received two letters: one from his father and one from Vivien Shelley. Their news was the same and concerned their marriage in the early spring, 'the *very early* spring' was the phrase in his father's letter.

Mark wrote to Vivien:

MY DEAR VIVIEN,

*But I also love you. What now? Am I to write an epi-thalamium? I feel more like a dirge. For me, I mean. A sort of hope's swan song. But why should I abandon hope? It is true I cannot support a wife. But Father can. Should fathers support their sons' wives? I shall put that down for our next D.S. debate. Only last week I spoke on Should All Essential Services be Nationalised? I spoke for the ayes, but the noes had it by 65 to 48. I don't know why I drag this in, but you can't expect me to be relevant or rational after such a facer. Does Colonel Shelley approve? After all, Father was only a captain and not a pukka captain at that. And consider his age. Forty-one. Have you thought of that? In ten years' time he will be senile, while I shall be in my prime and you will be the perfect age for a woman according to all the riper poets. You are apparently not agreed upon the date. You say the early spring; Father the 'very early spring.' There is hope in that. You are clearly reluctant. You hesitate over this step. And how right you are. Don't be rushed into anything. What's the hurry? I can understand Father. Every day brings him nearer grey hairs. Every wise saw and every modern instance deprecates such precipitancy. And assuming the worst happens, what am I going to call you? Surely not Mother, for that would give me a mother-fixation, and from the little I have read of such things I understand it is a grave handicap to a young man. It will have to be Vivien. And then when we're all holiday-making together we shall be taken for brother and sister: Father's children. He won't like that at all. For I don't intend to be left out of holidays. I shall be a leech. I foresee a hundred complications. Much better take me now I'm going. I shan't always be on offer. With love. As ever,*

MARK.

P.S.—*There's a beautiful kid here named Ashcroft. Age 13½, but looks about 10. Golden hair, blue eyes, face of a Fra Angelico angel. He'd make a stunning page. Shall I book him?*

To his father he wrote:

MY DEAR FATHER,

*When we were in Paris we saw a farce, you'll remember, at the Ba-Ta-Clan in which a father cuts out a son with his girl. You remarked that it was a very hackneyed theme. I assume it is far less trite if the son cuts out the father. You tell me Vivien will be spending two or three weeks over Christmas at Southways. That is very sporting of you. Or is it merely supreme confidence? Shall we say over-confidence? I forewarn you that until this hasty marriage has been duly and irrevocably solemnised I shall order my life by the twin mottoes of "All's fair in love" and "Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost." Once the marriage is made you've won, and I shall retire gracefully from the scene in accord with the Best Traditions and the Sacred and Inviolable Rights of the British Family and of the Public School Spirit so unchallengeably exemplified by Harborne.*

*I have written to Vivien. I expect she will show you the letter. If she does not . . . how that will wrench you!*

*News Item: I am taking over the editorship of The Harburnian, beginning next term.*

*No more. I am too bouleversé.*

Filially,  
MARK.

P.S.—*Delighted to be best man. If you'd asked anyone else I'd have disowned you. But I shall want carte blanche at your tailor's and at least a pony for incidentals.*

P.S.S.—*Peach major's governor is selling his M.G. I can have it for a hundred and fifty. ? ? ? Wedding present to the best man.*

Mark left Harborne just after his eighteenth birthday, at the end of the summer term. There was a year-old baby,

Tony, at *Southways* now, and as his father and stepmother thought of spending the summer that year at home, Mark had arranged to have a few weeks with them at Breford and then join a friend for a motoring tour on the Continent.

One morning quite at the beginning of the holiday he had been walking with his father over the Downs, and on their way back they sat down on the top of the Head to enjoy the breeze, rarely absent there.

Presently his father said, "Any thoughts about a career?"

"No definite ones. There's no hurry. Oxford first."

"You think of going to Oxford?"

"Well, I've not *thought* about it, Father. It's the usual programme."

"It's not like *Holy Writ*, you know, or the laws of the Medes and Persians."

"I suppose not."

"I've wasted my life."

Mark, half startled, shot him a quick glance, which his father caught, smiled, and then went on, "It's true enough. My education cost at a moderate estimate ten thousand pounds and I was twenty-two when it ended, or was considered to have ended. And all I did with that acquirement which had cost so much money and time was just nothing at all. Did it need all that expense to enable me to ride and shoot and play golf? My life has been wasted. I have been simply a parasitic growth on the body of the community. It is true I fought for my country, as the phrase has it, and paid in years of suffering for the privilege. It is true that my life is now a very happy one and I admit that I am a contented man. For all that, my life has been wasted. I have done nothing with what talents I had. I have never worked, never forced myself to do things against the grain. Even at school I did not work; it was unnecessary; ordinary intelligence and a minimum of attention enabled one to pass muster. That was all I wanted to do. And sometimes I realise, or think I do, just how much I have lost by having no work to do, no aim, no ambition. It is not too late to begin now, you think. It is. The tracks are all laid down in my mind. I can't make new ones. No man can. Not at my age. A hobby? Won't that fill the space? It won't begin to. It is just make-belief. A blade

that has been allowed to rust for over forty years is beyond polishing and sharpening; the rust has eaten too deep into it; there's no putting an edge on it. I should be sorry to think you are going to waste your life as I have wasted mine."

"You could cut me off with the proverbial shilling, you know," Mark smiled; "I should have to work then."

"It would probably be a good plan, but I'm not cut out for such drastic measures. I haven't the temperament. I am too open to self-questioning, to doubt, to fear. And in my heart I don't believe in drastic measures. I am convinced, without reason, that they are wrong. That is why I abominate and utterly condemn corporal punishment. I neither know nor can prove it is wrong: I feel it is wrong. A stupid and most unreliable method of judging, by the emotions, I admit. But we all do it, I probably more than most. But I would back my emotion against another's reason in this matter at least. I condemn all corporal punishment as wrong; I condemn, I abominate, all those who order it, all those who inflict it."

"I can't say I feel like that about it, Father. I've had my share at school. I don't think it's very important. I certainly can't share your feelings. But," with a smile, "we seem to be drifting away from my career. Or are you asking me to become a schoolmaster?"

"That isn't a career. It's a dedication. I shouldn't care to ask that of any man."

Mark laughed. "I'm certainly not of that noble stuff. I can think, to be frank, of no more deadly career. Why do men enter such a profession? There's neither honour in it nor money, nor even respect. They're a despised race."

"You've written some good things in *The Harburnian*."

"That's the paternal bias."

"Not altogether. Have you thought of writing?"

"As a profession?"

"Yes."

"Authorship strikes me as a bloodless sort of job for a man. I don't feel like sitting on my backside all day producing word patterns and thinking I am God Almighty. During the last two years at Harborne the Literary Society has shown signs of a trickle of life and we've had a fair number of

Eminent Authors to address us. They seemed weedy and etiolated egoists to me. I don't think it's a man's job."

"I was thinking rather of Fleet Street."

"Is that any better?"

"I gather it's something of a dog fight."

"That sounds more promising. What were——"

"Just a moment. I've not told you before of an incident that happened here at Breford, here on the Downs, in fact, a little over twenty years ago; about a year before I met your mother.

"I was walking over to the Haven to take the dogs for a swim when I overtook a young fellow of about my own age (as I thought, but he was five years older), and we went along together and fell to talking. He was a Canadian from Toronto, a reporter on *The Toronto Daily News*. He'd come to England to look for a job in Fleet Street. And without any introductions. He was walking to London from Southampton, seeing places, as he put it, on the way. I liked him. I liked the look of him: the tall gaunt figure, the eagle face, his talk, both manner and matter, and I liked what struck me as an astonishing pluck and self-confidence. I wanted to ask him to come and stay with me for a week or so at *Southways*, but hesitated, for a dozen reasons, mostly concerned with the way so self-assured, confident, and independent a young fellow, and a Colonial to boot, might take such an invitation. But when I overcame my hesitation and asked him, his instant and obvious pleasure made it plain that behind his bold façade lived a man as lonely as I was, as perhaps all men are. He stayed ten days, and told us when he left it was the most enjoyable time he had had in his life. He went to London. To Fleet Street."

"Did he get a job?"

"His name was Keir, Paul Keir."

"Keir? Keir? I don't—my hat! Gravenhurst, Lord Gravenhurst."

His father nodded. "Gravenhurst was the name of his native village in Ontario. We never meet these days and we don't often correspond. But we're very good friends. Very good indeed. He has always made a mountain out of my molehill of hospitality. Soon after you were born (he was

already beginning to make a stir) he wrote to me: 'When I'm bossing The Street, send your boy to me and I'll give him a job. It's a grand life for a live man.'"

"So he'd give me a job?"

"Undoubtedly."

"On *The Courier*?"

"On *The Morning Courier*, *The Evening Mail*, or *The Sunday News*, whichever you preferred. Appeal to you?"

"I'm not sure. Smacks of nepotism."

"Put that notion right out of your mind. I know Lord Gravenhurst. So does Fleet Street. He'll give you a post, as I've said, without any doubt; and with a modest salary; enough to live on, but nothing over for luxuries; beer, tobacco, and an occasional theatre and music-hall counting as necessities. But after that you'll have to stand on your own legs. If you make your way you'll do it by merit and any increase in salary you get you'll earn. He'd do the same with his own son. Now here's a choice for you, and you can think it over while you're abroad. You have a perfectly free choice. If you wish to go to Oxford and spend four years there very pleasantly and when you come down lead the sort of agreeable, useless life I've led, by all means do so. You will have an income sufficient for the purpose. Or you may want to go to Oxford to prepare for entry into one of the professions. Good. Or again, and this is the other choice, you may prefer to go into Fleet Street straight away and carve out a career for yourself. If you choose this you will have to live on your salary. But as soon as you reach a thousand a year I will double it, and perhaps then you may want to reach out a little farther than the confines of Fleet Street. Think all this over; don't be in a hurry to decide; but let me know as soon as you are sure you know what you want to do, and if it's Fleet Street I'll write at once to Lord Gravenhurst."

Early in September a wire came to *Southways* from Carassonne, in Languedoc. It ran:

*Please write Gravenhurst immediately stop expect to be home by the twelfth MARK.*

Mark started work with *The Morning Courier* at the beginning of October. He had had a brief interview with Lord

Gravenhurst and another almost equally brief with Thomas Massey, the editor. It was nearly five years before he had a second interview with the paper's proprietor, and during the first two of those five years he spoke only about half a dozen times to Mr. Massey: that was the measure of his insignificance. But his work was satisfactory and he hung on in the belief that one day he would get a chance of showing what he could do. That day seemed a long while coming. For the first year he went through the monotony, and the disappointing monotony, of being sent out to cover unimportant events, rarely with the satisfaction of getting anything in print; an occasional short paragraph was his utmost reward. Even stories he went after himself and believed were tremendous scoops rarely got in at all or achieved no more than admittance to the *News in Brief* column. Yet his work did slowly begin to make some impression, and by the time he was twenty-one he was being sent out to cover events of some minor significance and was getting occasional "feature" articles into the magazine page. The next year Jones, the literary editor, was away on sick leave for three months, and during his absence Mr. Massey asked Mark to take over the work, which he did so successfully that when at the end of the year Jones had to go to a sanatorium, where later he died, Mark was offered the post at a salary of £1,000 a year, and accepted it. He was also to be paid the usual rate for whatever feature articles he wrote for the literary page.

But he was not entirely happy in the work. Writing to his father about six months after he became *The Courier's* literary editor, he wrote: ". . . The best thing about the post is its name. Literary Editor sounds quite important. In actual fact it is, on a big popular daily like *The Courier*, relatively unimportant and a misnomer. I am not an editor in any sense of the word, for everything has to be submitted to Massey for the final *imprimatur*, and that can be, and has been once or twice, rather humiliating. And the job is decidedly not literary. Most of my time is taken up with reading utter bosh, sheer rubbish, and when something really good comes in (about once in a blue moon) Massey will probably veto it on the grounds of its being above the heads of *The Courier's* readers. I think he underestimates their intelligence,

but he has the last word. No! I don't like being a 'literary editor' very much. It's not the work I want to do, and I certainly shan't be satisfied to continue doing it very long. What I should really like to do is star features and star coverings. The sort of thing Wilson Scott does for us. When there's something big on, a royal funeral or a coronation or whatnot, and a splash feature's wanted, it's Scott who does it, and the article appears also in America in all the Milward newspapers. I believe I could do it and put my heart into it. I couldn't do it as well as Wilson Scott. There's only one Wilson Scott, just as there was, as the older men here say, only one Charlie Hands. But I could do it pretty well. And it would extend me. The stuff I am doing at present stultifies me, withers me up. You can't read bosh five or six hours a day for months on end without finding your thoughts beginning to run on bosh lines. Or that's what I feel is happening. . . ."

Nearly another year was to pass before he got his chance. It was in March, 1935. The Prime Minister was to make a speech at the opening of a new laboratory presented to Cambridge by Lord Bassett, the perambulator millionaire. The Premier's speech was expected to deal with important and serious questions of European policy, and Wilson Scott was to cover it for one of his famous 'features'. Scott would not report the speech; that was left to the mere journeyman; he was the master craftsman who would sit idle and apparently half asleep throughout the ceremony, and after it was over paint his word-picture of it 'for all time', as *The Courier* ventured to claim.

Wilson Scott was unable to go. He was too drunk to go. Massey hesitated between Mark and an older man, Vincent Card; chose Card, and then, at the last moment, changed his mind, and Mark went to Cambridge. As his taxi crawled along in the line of cars pulling up in twos and threes outside the entrance hall a barrel organ was playing, and he found himself humming the tunes. As he sat listening to the Premier's speech he was endeavouring to discover, with an anxiety which became desperate as the speech approached its peroration, some dominant idea which he could make the motif of his article. And it was only in the last few minutes that he found it, when he had abandoned hope and was

allowing his mind to wander back over the events of that morning's journey from London, begun so optimistically and now like to end so flatly. Into that uneasy review drifted the tune he had hummed; and with it came the barrel organ. The barrel organ. He knew instantly that here was his motif, and having impatiently waited for the booming voice to finish, he hurried back to his hotel and wrote the article that appeared in the next morning's *Courier* under the title *The Barrel Organ*.

About the middle of the afternoon (it was a Friday) Lord Gravenhurst called up the office from his home *The Towers*, near Colchester, and asked Massey who had written the article, which was unsigned. Being told, he asked for Mark, and said to him: "I liked your barrel organ thing. Very good. Come and spend the week-end with me. You'd better leave at once, as we dine at seven-thirty sharp."

It was a very pleasant week-end. Mark found Lord Gravenhurst and his youthful-looking and pretty wife extremely agreeable, unaffected to the point of simplicity, and their hospitality so unobtrusive as to be quite literally homelike. On the Sunday evening Lord Gravenhurst took Mark up to his study to show him his incunabula, of which he was a modest collector. After some quarter of an hour's wandering about his study, with Mark a pace behind (both spatially and intellectually), Lord Gravenhurst said abruptly, "Enough of these playthings. Sit down. I want to talk to you. Comfortable? Good. How old are you? H'm. And you've been with *The Courier* what? No, don't tell me. I know. Should I be far out in estimating that you make about fifteen hundred a year on *The Courier*?"

"Almost to a farthing, sir."

"We pay Wilson Scott three thousand, and he sometimes does not write a line in a month. Paid I should have said. He's fired. For drunkenness. The post is yours if you want it. Well?"

"Thank you, sir."

"All right. This drink business is a damned nuisance. You drink, don't you? And smoke? Of course. I'm not proposing to interfere in matters not my concern. I'll tell you about myself. I smoked and drank as a young man. I smoked heavily

and I drank almost as heavily, and chiefly whisky. It's a habit easy to acquire in Canada, especially on a newspaper. Then I came to England, and I came with ambitions. By the time I was thirty I was within sight of seeing some of those ambitions realised. But my health began to play tricks with me. I knew what was the matter. I was eating too much, drinking too much, smoking too much, and not getting enough exercise. I was heading, not for a breakdown or anything spectacular like that, but for a permanent condition of never feeling quite up to par. I began more and more frequently to feel that way: presently it would be chronic.

"I cut out smoking; I cut out drinking; right out, both of them. I cut down my intake of food by half and I took to walking as much as possible instead of using my cars. And I walked at week-ends and on the few brief holidays I took. I don't play golf or games and I don't ride, fish, or shoot. Don't appeal to me. Bore me. But I like walking.

"In a few months I had recovered a physical condition I had not enjoyed since adolescence. There is no doubt at all that the man who does not drink or smoke is fitter, and so more efficient, than the man who does. And if in addition he is sparing with food and takes moderate and regular exercise he will be as fit as a civilised man can be; and that is very fit indeed, far more fit than any savage. And with moderate luck and barring accidents he will never need a day in bed and should live in the full possession of all his faculties (plus his hair and his teeth) until, I was going to say until he's ready to die, and there's more than a speck of truth in that.

"I adhered to my strict regimen for seven years and then, in the matter of smoking and drinking, I deliberately abandoned it. Why? Simply because they were a social habit of such ubiquitousness that a man who did not indulge in them became something of an Ishmael. I mean a man who led the sort of life I was bound to lead if my ambitions were to be realised. A man who drinks only water at dinner, whether it is at his own house or a friend's or at a public one, is something of an embarrassing guest. He does not quite fit in. His abstinence cannot but bear the smear of superiority, almost of smugness. He is the skeleton at the feast. And if he also does not smoke he is doubly a nuisance, doubly a sort of tacit

reproach to the weaker vessels. People tend to leave him out of their invitations, except to those business repasts where one is prepared to suffer and endure for the sake of future advantage. And so purely as a social act I decided to drink alcohol and to smoke tobacco again; but in the strictest moderation; just enough not to be different from the herd. It is not entirely without significance that the meaning of *egregious* has become degraded." He smiled. "There was also the fact that I had just married, that my wife was fond of society, and that she liked tobacco and wine. I said just now in strict moderation, and I meant that. My wife is equally moderate. When we are at home we share a half bottle of claret at luncheon and a half bottle of Burgundy at dinner. I smoke one cigar after each of those meals; my wife rarely exceeds half a dozen cigarettes a day. When dining or lunching out we are as abstemious. We avoid cocktails if possible, but," with another smile, "we don't make ourselves *egregious* about it: if the occasion prescribes them we take them—er—medicinally. And the same with liqueurs.

"Forgive a personal question: have you marriage in view in the near future? Are you engaged? No. And you are twenty-three. A man of twenty-three would do well to think very seriously of marriage. I am considering marriage in only one of its aspects, that of physical union. I am aware that many doctors will give the opinion that complete sexual abstinence, even over a period of many years, over a lifetime in fact, is a perfectly healthy condition; that the sexual desire can be sublimated, and so forth. You will have heard the same thing, no doubt. It is not true. All experience of life proves its falsity; all history, and especially the history of religions, give it the lie. I will admit that to such abstinence, to such attempted sublimation (for it can never completely succeed), the world may owe many of its saints and mystics. Whether the world is better for its saints and mystics I do not propose to argue; a strong case could, I imagine, be made for both propositions. Saints and mystics are not relevant to the matter. I am dealing with ordinary men and women like ourselves. And I am convinced beyond any doubt that the only possible happy and healthy life for men and women is in physical union. And this union should not be delayed beyond the middle twenties.

If it is four or five years sooner, so much the better. And since civilisation has not evolved any better method than marriage for such physical union (and such unions outside marriage are apt to bring too many vexatious and sometimes tragical consequences) I view with profound disquietude the increasing tendency to postpone marriage. A man should marry as soon as it is economically possible; a woman as soon as she is physically ready for wifehood and motherhood. It is a mistake to give a man his smallest salary at the beginning of his career. I am not thinking of boys, but of adults. To start a young man at, say, two or three hundred pounds a year with annual increments until he reaches six or seven hundred pounds is in my view economically and socially unsound; and on the plane of happiness it is deplorable. Much better start him at five hundred and keep him at five hundred, always assuming that five hundred is sufficient for reasonably comfortable existence. I am sure you will not put to me that unthinking and unimaginative question: what about incentive? What stronger incentive is there than happiness? But it is no use crying after Utopia, which, by the by, is only a shorter way of spelling common sense. We must do what we can with what we have." With a smile, "and practise what we preach. I try to. There is no man of all the thousands in my employment who by the time he is twenty-five is not receiving remuneration ample for a comfortable marriage in his own class of society. If he is not worth that amount I fire him. But you would be astonished at the small number of those who have been fired since I became an employer on so large a scale."

Back to Town with the new post in his pocket, Mark had an unexpected visitor at *The Courier* offices within a week of his taking over from the discharged Wilson Scott. Scott himself.

"Congratulations, dear boy," he said in his florid way; "the Chief has an eye for a good man. I liked your *Barrel Organ*. Dam' good. I could write once. Before I turned sot. May I offer a word of fatherly advice? It's the only paternal thing about me. Cut it out. The booze. Right out. There's no such thing as moderate drinking for our sort. All drinking's immoderate for us. For the last two years my fountain pen has

been filled with whisky. You'll hear men say they write their best stuff when they're half cut. There was never a damned lie. It looks good to them, but to nobody else. Take a good look at me. Go on; look me in the face. It was never an oil-painting. Pretty, isn't it? Whisky. Look at this," holding out a shaking hand. "Same again. It won't be steady till I've knocked back a bottle. How old am I? Guess. I'm not touchy. H'm. Take away ten and you have it. Fifty. In my prime. You really thought I was seventy. Whisky. Have a good breakfast this morning? Ham and eggs; toast and lashings of Frank Smith's Oxford. *Bon appétit!* eh? Mine was half a bottle. It saves on food. Wilson Scott. I used to think, when I was young, that one day Wilson Scott would be as famous a name in literature as Walter. It's not even mud now. Not even here where I made it." He held out his hand. "Well, goodbye, dear boy. Best of luck. And cut it right out."

As star feature writer of so widely read a paper as *The Courier* Mark was now a noted man in the small world of Fleet Street, and as all his work was signed it gradually became familiar to the millions who read Lord Gravenhurst's three papers, for Mark's work now also appeared from time to time in *The Evening Mail* and *The Sunday News*. But it was a very gradual process, and 'familiar' connotes no more than their barely conscious recognition of the name. Had someone approached them in the street and asked, 'Who is Mark Passmore?' they would (ninety-nine per cent. of them) have stared and shaken their heads.

Mark found it all rather pleasant and he did much good work, which was remarked and praised, not only by his colleagues, but by men on rival papers and occasionally by Lord Gravenhurst. His articles were run in America by the Brandt Milward chain of newspapers, and now and again letters and very occasionally cables found their way on to his desk with warm praise from New York newspapermen whom he had never met, some of whose very names were unknown to him.

The very agreeable feeling of making a stir in the world was not infrequently his. It was not a very big stir and the world was really but a small fraction, yet the illusion worked and the savour was good. When during the early summer of 1935 Germany announced the reintroduction of conscription, his

article *The Apple of Versailles* was widely quoted, the Dean of St. Botolph's lifting a very sizable chunk of it to point a moral in one of those notorious sermons which had set him high among the Church of England's agnostics.

The times were, or seemed to be, fruitful for his work. There was the death of King George V, made memorable by the well-chosen words of the announcement broadcast every half-hour: 'the King's life is moving slowly to its close.' Mark's article on the funeral was headed *A Common Man Passes*. When in November 1936 President Roosevelt was returned for a second term of office, Mark's *Keeping the Pilot* was praised in America.

His article on the abdication of Edward VIII was headed *Noblesse Oblige*, and began: "That the head wearing a crown is a weary one, an uneasy one, is a pious tradition, but a false one. Of the thousands of kings known to history, fewer than a dozen have voluntarily abdicated. Plainly it is an extremely pleasant office; one which most men would give their ears to obtain and which most kings are willing to give everything but their heads to retain. . . ."

The article provoked a certain amount of hostile criticism and earned him a reproof from Lord Gravenhurst, who wrote: "I did not like *Noblesse Oblige*. It had an anti-monarchical smack about it; more than a smack, in fact. I do not care a straw what your political opinions are, but I am concerned with what appears in my newspapers. My papers have always been strong supporters of the British Constitution, and since that Constitution rests on a monarchical basis such an article as yours should not have appeared in their columns. You will say that you must be free to write what you think, and that this is a democratic country. Side-stepping the second proposition, I agree with the first, but I would add 'not *all* you think.' It is not done. It can't be done. No man says or can say, writes or can write, all he thinks. You will tell me that I am side-stepping the whole issue, and I will admit that I am. We have it on scriptural authority that there is a time and a place for everything. This was not the time for *Noblesse Oblige*, nor was *The Morning Courier* its place. In other words, for those things you wish to write which do not accord with the policy of my papers I must ask you to find another place; and,

further, I should be glad if such articles did not appear under your name. I hope this letter will not goad you into a Declaration of Independence, for quite apart from my personal feelings I should be sorry to lose the services of your pen, which has proved itself an able one. . . ."

Mark's article on the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth the following May was plainly approved, and earned him a pat from Lord Gravenhurst, who sent him a postcard: 'First rate.'

Two days later the Imperial Conference opened in London, and Mark's *The Silver Cord* earned him another postcard: 'Fine. Now take a holiday.'

He went down to *Southways* by car. He felt tired and de-vitalised. Something was the matter with him; not his health, either of body or mind; but the spirit had gone out of him. He was making a lot of money; he was already a noted writer; he was doing work he liked; yet he was dissatisfied with his life and was vaguely unhappy (although that was not, he felt, quite the right word), and he had been so now for some considerable time. Having pulled all this out into the daylight as he drove along and faced it and looked at it squarely, he asked himself, Why? but finding no answer, he carefully put it back and shut the lid down for the time being.

He spent a happy week at *Southways*, but he did not have those walks and discussions with his father that he usually had. He gave most of his time to eight-year-old Tony, boating, swimming, and riding. He grew fond of the boy, who was a handsome little fellow with engaging ways and so captivating a smile that Mark studied to evoke it. One day, as they sat on the beach watching a *Punch and July* show, there came into Mark's mind, as he watched Tony's intent, enraptured face, the fantastic thought that if he had married Vivien and this boy beside him were his son would he not probably look much the same as he did now?—the same fair hair, blue eyes, and delicately beautiful features? the same slim, straight body? Or would he have been utterly different? And the mind; what would that have been? How much the same, or similar, or different? He played with the thought for some time, almost losing himself among the strange bypaths into which it led him before he abandoned it.

His father's and Vivien's obvious happiness contented him. It was a pleasant thing with which to be in contact. It warmed and soothed. Yet it vaguely disturbed him, as did Vivien's attractiveness, which he found as strong as ever. During that week one of the maids at *Southways* was married from the house. She was a very pretty girl, and as she and her husband drove away she was flushed and laughing. Mark found himself staring after the taxi, the girl's face remaining with him very vividly.

As he drove back to London at the end of his week he was aware that the vague dissatisfaction with life was still with him. He was also aware, and acutely aware, that the outstanding, the significant things of the holiday, the things chosen by himself unconsciously for that pride of place, were concerned with love and marriage, with that physical union which Lord Gravenhurst had so dogmatically declared was essential for human happiness. Was that lack in his life, he asked himself, the root of that vague dissatisfaction?

## *Chapter Two*

### SEATHORPE

THE day of Mark's return to Town there was a spectacular car smash, which killed the holder of one of the oldest baronetcies, Sir Arnold Borlase. Travelling with Sir Arnold were his only son, Clive, and his only grandchild, Julian, who were also killed. What made the story of interest to the public was not this wiping out of a family and an old title (for this was said now to be extinct), but the circumstances which had made this threefold killing possible. Clive Borlase with his little boy Julian had been staying with his father for a week, and on the Sunday was to have left to return to London to join his wife, taking Julian with him. They were going by road, but when they came to set off about ten in the morning the car would not start. It was a car of a famous make, and almost new. Sir Arnold's chauffeur, Bolton, a first-rate mechanic, could find nothing wrong after the most

thorough examination. Yet the engine would not start; would not even sputter. Bolton suggested he should go to a local garage and get a man to come up, and the two of them would then thoroughly overhaul the car. This was agreed to, and Clive decided not to start until the early afternoon, lurching before they went. But the best man the garage could supply had no more success than Bolton; nor did their two heads do any better combined. Only thing to do, he said, was to have the car taken to the garage, and he'd take the engine down. It was then rather late to think of travelling that day, and so a wire was sent to Mrs. Borlase. Sir Arnold, who had been going to London that Tuesday, said he might just as well go a day earlier, and immediately after breakfast they set off, Bolton driving. Bolton had done the journey scores of times and knew every inch of the way, yet took a wrong turning which necessitated a detour of many miles and earned him a snapped reproof from Sir Arnold, who had arranged a luncheon appointment at his club; and it was no doubt Bolton's desire to make up the time that led him to take the risk which led to the accident. What actually happened was never known, as the driver of the big lorry was also killed and Bolton was so severely injured that it was many weeks before he was able to make a statement, and then it was the common one in such an affair: he had no recollection at all of what happened. He remembered turning out of a narrow side road, and his next memory was waking and finding himself in Hadleigh Cottage Hospital.

The inquest and Press comment on the odd chain of events leading to the accident (a chain which, one writer said, surely pointed to predestination as the key to the enigma of existence) kept the affair before the public for a week, and it had not been entirely forgotten when interest was revived to a very lively extent by the arrival in London of a claimant to the title and estates: and one whose claim was so obviously uncontestable that he had had no difficulty in obtaining a loan through his solicitor in Australia to finance his journey. And it was not a cheap trip, for he had come by air, and piloted by no less a person than the famous Don Perryman.

This arrival by air caught the public fancy, and the new baronet became front-page news. And everything about him

and everything he did but added to the public interest. He called himself Sir Jack Borlase, which seemed quaint. 'Why not Sir John?' everyone asked, including his London solicitor, who pointed out that Sir Jack lacked the dignity which was a Borlase tradition. But the new baronet did not care twopence about dignity or tradition; his name was Jack; he was baptised Jack; and so Sir Jack he would be. He was a short, wiry man of about thirty, with light hair, pale blue eyes, and sharp features. He came from Australia (he refused to be any more explicit) and spoke with the quasi-Cockney accent peculiar to Australians. He stayed at one of the smaller and cheaper hotels in the Strand, and was obviously quite unused to any life above that of the poorest classes. A writer in the Socialist paper *Daily Call* said the new baronet looked like a Sydney larrikin, and the paper afterwards referred to him as the Larrikin Baronet, a name which was copied by other papers as soon as the public showed a liking for it. And as the Larrikin Baronet the Press continued to refer to him as long as he remained an item of news, which was for at least a week after he had left Town to take possession of the Borlase estates and country house *Freyne Court*, about two miles out of Seathorpe on the Norfolk coast.

A few pressmen followed Sir Jack Borlase into Norfolk to see if something in the way of a story might not yet come out of the Larrikin Baronet; and several cameramen accompanied them in the hope of scooping an exclusive before public interest in 'the little runt' died away. The phrase was Bob Farr's, the cameraman of *The Daily Call*, and it was to be some months before his colleagues allowed him to forget it.

The cameramen were for a time more fortunate than the pressmen, for if it were impossible to get more than a distant glimpse of the Larrikin Baronet (still less to interview him) there was always *Freyne Court* to be photographed, and it was well worth photographing, even though their art-editors might refuse to give them space. It was a lovely Elizabethan manor-house with ten acres of gardens and orchard and some fifty of pleasantly wooded uplands. From some coigns the sea could be glimpsed as a remote glittering background.

And while the newspapermen hung about *Freyne Court* hoping for the best, the Larrikin Baronet was striving to get

on to some terms of association with his staff, that little community of thirty-odd people for whose very existence he had been completely unprepared; who regarded him, he thought, with a mixture of amusement and contempt; and whom he felt tempted to dismiss, closing down *Freyne Court* and returning to London, or to Australia. London had disappointed him, chilled him, but it had been better than this ancestral home of his with its patronising and no doubt secretly sniggering servants and all its neighbouring county people, who had made no overtures of friendship and who, he felt, regarded him with that same amusement and contempt as his servants, but with hostility too. Why, he could not understand.

Having decided to stay ('to stick it out with the b—s' as he phrased it to himself), he set himself to get on to some sort of terms with the human beings inside this big shack which was now his. He would leave those living outside it for later consideration.

He asked a maid (the place seemed full of maids; he was always stumbling over some one or other) to tell the house-keeper he wanted to speak to her. Mrs. Andrews was a tall, handsome, and dignified woman in the early fifties; her dress, her hands, her hair, were always perfection. Her entrance overwhelmed the baronet. She was taller than he was, and he could not but feel that she looked far more like the owner of *Freyne Court* than he did. To cover this feeling of inferiority, he began in a rush, "I want you, Ma, to get—er—to tell—", But he got no further.

"Mrs. Andrews, sir," she interrupted gently.

"That's right. What about it?"

"Only, sir, that it is customary to address me by my name, if you don't mind me mentioning it."

"That's all right. I see. Well, look here, Mrs. Andrews, I want to have a talk with all the—er—servants just to make it plain where we are and how we stand, if you see what I mean."

"O quite, sir. When would you wish—?"

"This afternoon, I think. What d'you think?"

"It is for you to say, sir; but this afternoon would be **very** suitable. In the library, sir, or the refectory or—"

"What's that?"

"The banqueting-hall, sir; the large dining-room."

"I see. Better say library. More cosy. I'm not an oraytor."

"Very good, sir. At three o'clock, shall we say?"

"O.K. O, I say."

"Yes, sir?"

"What do I say to the butler? Do I call him mister?"

"No, sir; just Magson. And the footmen too, sir. The maids their first names. But it will rarely be necessary, sir. Except for Magson, myself, and your valet, you will not come into contact with the staff except at table, sir."

"Right-o. Three o'clock it is, then. So long."

Mrs. Andrews turned at this and said gravely, "You wouldn't say that, sir. I mean, in England. No doubt in Australia, sir——"

"Not 'So long'? I see. What?"

"Just, 'That will be all, Mrs. Andrews, thank you.'"

"O.K." With a faint grin at Mrs. Andrews's now turned back: "And that goes for Magson and Cooper, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." And the door closed softly.

"Well, I just want to say a few words now we're all together," the Larrikin Baronet said that afternoon as he glanced swiftly from the face of one servitor to another, nervously avoiding catching anyone's eye. "I suppose I'm your employer, as you might say, but if I'm employing you just to look after me it seems a lot of labour wasted, if you see what I mean. I did think of shutting up most of the house and living in a few rooms—for a bit, anyhow; after all, forty rooms and all the offices seems a bit thick for one man, as I just said. But then I thought if I shut up the house all of you except one or two would have to go, and perhaps you don't want to go. Perhaps you been here a long time and got fond of the place. I can understand that. It's a picture, and, speaking for myself, I've never seen anything like it. So I dropped the idea of shutting up the place and anyone can stop who wants to. Anyhow, for a time. And o' course if any of you want to go, that'll be O.K. I don't want to keep anybody against their will. The same wages'll be paid and the same rises. And now does anybody want to ask me anything?" No one did. All were too relieved that this ordeal of embarrassment was over to prolong

it by so much as a second. They sat very still, wondering if he would now say they might go or would he wait until someone took the initiative. The Larrikin Baronet was wondering much the same thing, and he began to fidget impatiently with a large gold watch-chain curving slackly across his waistcoat. To his relief, the butler took charge. "If that is all, sir," he said in his richest voice, "may we get back to our duties?"

"That's right. That's O.K. mi—er—Magson." And then, glancing quickly over to Mrs. Andrews, he said solemnly, "That will be all, Mrs. Andrews, thank you."

Later Magson and Mrs. Andrews discussed the Larrikin Baronet over several cups of tea and Bath Oliver biscuits. "You're not thinking of stopping?" Magson asked.

"Well, Mr. Magson," Mrs. Andrews replied, with her cup poised and her little finger crooked, "I haven't made up my mind. It will be trying, I admit. But it would be doing a kind human act to stop and help the poor little man."

"There is that, of course." Magson nodded. "I never believe in doing things in a hurry. We've been very comfortable here, very. I think you'll agree." Mrs. Andrews nodded and brushed away a crumb. "And there's no reason," went on the butler, "why we shouldn't be just as comfortable now. Perhaps more," and he gave her a slow glance.

Mrs. Andrews again nodded. "Quite, Mr. Magson, quite."

"And of course," Magson continued "there's the chance that he might turn out after all to be an impossiter." And he looked at her with his head on one side.

"I don't think so," she said. "I understand there was no doubt about the vali-dity of his claim. Absolutely unimpeachable. I wonder what he meant by not wanting to keep any-body against their will."

The butler smiled complacently. "Been reading up a bit of English history, I expect, and has got ideas into his head. Thinks we're all his retainers. Very humorous that."

Mrs. Andrews laughed genteelly. "How you do go on, Mr. Magson!" she said.

As if he had suddenly remembered it, Magson said, "Cooper's going."

"Dear me! I am sorry. He is such a stylish man. And so agreeable. Are you sure?"

"I wouldn't like to be sure about anything Cooper says," the butler replied with a trace of tartness in his tone, "but he told me he drew the line at 'guttersnipes, title or no title.'"

"And what did you say?"

"I said: 'Why cut off your nose to spite your face?' I said," lowering his voice. "'Why throw away a good thing when it comes your way?' I said," bending forward, and very softly, "'For a smart man who is willing to put his pride in his pocket there's quite a lot of money can be made in certain circumstances.'" He repeated, "In certain circumstances."

Mrs. Andrews nodded. "And with all probability."

"Absolutely. I said, 'Why quarrel with your bread, butter, and jam; *and jam*,' I said, 'all for a bit of fastidiousness.'"

"Very true. I think we all ought to stand by Sir Jack and help him all we can. And what did Mr. Cooper say then?"

"He said he'd once sunk as low as a judge and he'd got a title, and he'd regretted it ever since. No breeding at all and no family. But of course it wasn't really a title. Just a knight. I told him that valleying Sir Jack wouldn't be valleying the man, but a Borlase. It was the family name, not the holder, that mattered."

"Just as it's the King's uniform which is saluted and not the man inside it," Mrs. Andrews observed; "which is as it should be, for some of them are very queer gentlemen. And what did he say to that?"

"He said no. He said if a man with a great family name was mud he made the family name mud, and if you touched mud you got mucky. He said he wouldn't touch him with a barge pole."

"And what did you say to that? Something comic, I'll be bound."

"Rather good; rather good, perhaps. I said, 'There's touchings and touchings, Cooper,' I said; 'touchings and touchings.'"

The Larrikin Baronet was now beginning to appear quite often in Seathorpe, and might have been photographed by all and sundry, to say nothing of the Press cameramen; but these gentlemen wanted a shot of Sir Jack with *Freyne Court* as a background. As, however, he refused to be interviewed or to allow reporters or cameramen to enter his grounds, there

seemed little purpose in their remaining, and most returned to London. In any case the little man from Australia was no longer hot news. But Bob Farr, the cameraman of *The Daily Call*, and Arthur Hoskin, a reporter from *The Morning Courier*, remained: Farr determined to get his shot, and Hoskin mildly interested in seeing what happened.

Farr climbed over the wall and hid behind a tall shrub. It was ten o'clock; the morning warm and cloudless. Hoskin from a vantage-point without watched the affair on his own behalf rather than on that of his paper.

Sir Jack emerged from the great front door, passed through the portals, and descended the steps. Farr stepped from behind the shrub and took his shot. The Larrikin Baronet stopped short, and Farr, misinterpreting his silence and the expression on his face, thought he might as well make hay while the sun shone, and said snappily: "Just a little to the right and smile." Bob Farr was a biggish young man, and although fat and out of condition it certainly did not occur to him that he stood in any physical danger from the baronet. He was not to know that this 'little runt' of a fellow had been reared in a Sydney slum where everything a boy cherished or coveted had to be fought for bloodily, and that few days had passed in his life there when he had not had at least one such fight. Mr. Bob Farr was to be instructed. His camera was snatched from him and dashed to the ground. It was an expensive one, and he was furious and flung a punch at the baronet's jaw. It may have been that all his life Mr. Farr had had a secret longing to punch a titled jaw and that here seemed the perfection of opportunity, for Titled Jaw was the aggressor and he was also a little runt. Or it may have been that he simply reacted naturally to provocation. In any case the punch was flung. It did not land, but one from the baronet did, several indeed, and Mr. Farr went down, and, dazed and bloody, found himself being dragged to the big wrought-iron gates through which he was presently ejected. A request for his smashed camera was so violently and profanely received that he set off for the police station to ask for assistance in its recovery, but changed his mind and returned to Town to report, leaving the recovery of the camera to the *Call's* solicitors.

If Mr. Bob Farr had failed to get his scoop he had provided an excellent one for Mr. Hoskin, and that young man made the most of it and a quite funny account of the affray appeared exclusively in the next morning's *Courier*. It was headed *The Fighting Baronet*, and one of its not least appreciative readers was Mark.

He read it through twice, and during the morning frequently found himself thinking not only about the thrashing of Farr, but about the whole affair of the Larrikin Baronet. For once he went out to lunch alone, and as he ate his mind continued to be preoccupied with the odd little man who now held the Borlase title and estates. He felt that there was a first-class story behind it all if only it could be dug out: that so far what had appeared about the Larrikin Baronet was the merest scratching of the surface. All that afternoon the affair continually niggled at his mind until the mere feeling of the morning hardened into conviction: there was a story hidden here; a story for him; perhaps a great one. He would go down to Seathorpe and stay for a month if necessary; or even two. It was a long while since he'd had a holiday of any length.

As he began thinking over the things necessary to be done or arranged for in view of such an absence, he suddenly found himself wondering why the name Seathorpe seemed now to strike a familiar note in his memory. It hadn't done so before. When he had read that Sir Jack Borlase was going down to his county seat *Freyne Court* near Seathorpe on the Norfolk coast the name of the place had not meant anything to him. Why should it now? He puzzled over this for some time and then took a guide book to Norfolk from the shelves and turned its pages. Here it was: 'Seathorpe, population 4,013; 125 miles from London . . . golf links . . . this delightful health resort . . . fine common beautiful with gorse . . . wide golden sands . . . bowls, tennis, fishing, cricket . . . perhaps the most magnificent Old English church in the country . . .' His eyes swept over the trite familiar phrases: were all the guide books of the world, he asked himself, written by the same hand? He continued to turn the pages slowly, and then he came upon a full-page advertisement for *The Royal Hotel*, Seathorpe, and instantly memory began its miraculous working.

He went presently down to the file room, and was not long in finding what he wanted. It had happened three years earlier, in the November. A young man with the romantic name of Brian Knox-Strangeways had been arrested at Scarborough and charged with the manslaughter of a prominent tradesman of the town with whom he had been staying for some weeks as an apparently very welcome and honoured guest. Mr. Knox-Strangeways was young, handsome, cultured, Public School, and charming (the epithets are the reporter's); the tradesman was middle-aged; his wife considerably younger and attractive. There had been a quarrel over the woman and a scuffle, in which the tradesman fell, or was knocked, down and fractured his skull on the kerb of the drawing-room fireplace, dying without recovering consciousness.

Odd details came out at the inquest concerning Mr. Knox-Strangeways, and odder ones at the trial; and it was here that Seathorpe came into the picture. In the very early summer of that year a young, handsome, cultured, Public School, and charming young man had come to stay at *The Royal Hotel*, giving his name as Brian Knox-Strangeways. He very soon became popular in the town, and if he were not invited everywhere (for the county people held aloof) he was a decidedly welcome guest at the houses of many of the well-to-do tradesmen. So welcome, indeed, that he shortly left his apartments at *The Royal* and stayed first with one and then with another of Seathorpe's eminent tradesmen, who were delighted to entertain this cultured young man whose presence in their house conferred upon it a distinction that they highly valued and that was highly envied by those not fortunate enough to find favour in the eyes of Mr. Knox-Strangeways. And if the eminent tradesmen were delighted, their wives and daughters were enchanted.

Mr. Brian Knox-Strangeways was indeed an enchanter, and he waved a magic wand to no small effect; but what that effect was might never have been known but for the unfortunate scuffle with the Scarborough tradesman; for the eminent tradesmen of Seathorpe, realising (when in October Mr. Knox-Strangeways disappeared) that they had been badly milked, decided to keep their own counsel, preferring to endure their losses rather than the delighted jeers of those of

their fellows whose homes had not been honoured by Mr. Knox-Strangeways. But there was no hiding it now, for the charming young man not only admitted it, but boasted about it, declaring that he had had from those Seathorpe snobs (the word was his) no less a sum than fifteen hundred pounds; and every farthing of it, he declared, a free gift. And who could gainsay him? He had not stolen it. It had been given him. And he had given in return his charm, his culture, his Public School accent, and his assiduous attentions. A fair exchange.

Those Seathorpe townsmen (and especially their wives and daughters) who had not been honoured by Mr. Brian Knox-Strangeways savoured now a very seventh heaven of malicious enjoyment. For Mr. Brian Knox-Strangeways had no right to that highly romantic name. ('Didn't we always say so?') His name was the extremely plebeian Henry Taylor. He was not, alas, Public School: merely elementary. And that wonderful accent of his, prosecuting counsel said, was a silly affection that could have deceived only the most simple-minded and ignorant. But the pinnacle of the seventh heaven was the undisputed fact that Mr. Henry Taylor had not only made love to the Scarborough tradesman's young wife (and apparently very successful love), but had managed to extract a gift of several hundred pounds from her husband. Well, wasn't it perfectly clear? Plain as a pikestaff. They didn't want to appear uncharitable, and all they would say was they hoped there wouldn't be consequences. Pressed to be a little more explicit, they refused. No; they wouldn't go any further than that. They just hoped there wouldn't be consequences. In the course of Nature, as you might say.

Mark smiled several times as he read the account of the affair in three consecutive issues of *The Courier*, and laughed softly at the phrase 'Seathorpe Gudgeon'. He would certainly go down to Seathorpe. Even if the story he hoped to find eluded him, it might be an amusing way of spending a month. And he would stay at *The Royal Hotel*.

He went down to Seathorpe on August the first. His train was late, and when he went into the dining-room at *The Royal* for his luncheon it was nearly empty. The waiter handed him the menu, and stood beside him looking blankly out of the

window at the sunny sea and stroking his chin. Mark's glance went to the grey-white mask of his face, and he wondered what the man was thinking about. He often wondered what waiters thought as they stood about passively, apathetically. "I'll have the *table d'hôte*, please, and a pint of bitter," he said.

The waiter brought his soup, and there being no one else to attend to at his tables, he remained close at hand; moved a cruet; shifted a napkin and shifted it back again.

"Pretty little place, Seathorpe," Mark said.

"All right for those who like it," the waiter said; "I can't understand anyone coming to a dump like this for a holiday."

This was refreshing, and Mark smiled. In his experience waiters at holiday resorts were either too overworked and tired to talk or else sang the praises of their resort in the expressionless tones of an automaton. "Why," he said, "what's the matter with it?"

"Everything. There's nothing to do. No pier; no beach shows; only one cinema and that's a flea-pit. And the people, pigs. You'll like the east coast, they told me (It's my first season here. And my last); nice weather; nice people. Bunch of tight-fisted snobs. You staying long, sir?"

"I couldn't say. Perhaps a month. But how do the people amuse themselves?"

"Stuffing their guts; filling their skins; and talking scandal."

"There's golf and riding and boating and swimming."

"If you like that sort o' thing and have got the dough. Most of the visitors have. Seathorpe doesn't cater for trippers. I've been here three months to the day. I get one evening off a week: from tea-time till midnight. No wages. Know what my tips have averaged out? Less'n four pounds a week. This is my last day in this god dam' dump. I've got a three months' engagement at *The George*, Blackpool. Paid thirty pounds for it, and if I don't clear a hundred and fifty I'll be unlucky."

"What made you come here?"

"No idea. Just thought I would. And I might 'a been at Blackpool coining it." A faint smile crept over the grey mask. "An' what made you come here, sir, if you don't mind me asking?"

Mark laughed. "Not at all. Partly, I suppose, for a holi-

day. It was a rather sudden decision. I read about Sir Jack Borlase and the cameraman in the papers, and possibly that had something to do with my choice of Seathorpe."

"Ever seen him?"

"Sir Jack Borlase? No."

"He's a decent little cock. And he's a man; never mind about gentleman."

"Does he come in here?"

"In here! He wouldn't be found dead in a joint like this. He's got no time for the nobs. Talks like a bloke from the Mile End Road. No, he doesn't come in here. *The Goat's* his house o' call. It's a free house and the best pub in Seathorpe. It's a working man's pub and none of the snobs use it. Their house is *The Ship*. Sir Jack don't use *The Ship*; nor *The Club*; *The Gentlemen's Club* is its real name. Would you believe it? Beats the band, don't it? So if you want to see Sir Jack you'll have to go in *The Goat*. The reg'lars won't mind. But if one o' them dropped in *The Ship* and called for a pint they'd toll the church bell."

Mark laughed. "I'm a newspaperman. And that's a working man, believe me."

"Is it?" Again the faint smile crept over the grey mask. "Working men don't put up at *The Royal*. No offence, but you don't know the meaning of the word. It means a man who does the world's hard work and the world's dirty work, and who gets paid for doing it just enough to bring his kids up in the same way he was brought up himself. What they call a vicious circle. A miner's a working man; so's a brick-layer; and a merchant seaman; and a navvy; and a dustman; and a sewerman; and, if you want the old rhyme, so's a tinker, tailor, soldier, and sailor. And a waiter's the lowest of the lot. He's got to live by cadging."

The waiter's tirade had not been continuous, but variegated by his fetching of the six courses which made up *The Royal's* *table d'hôte*. His final judgment on Seathorpe was delivered when he brought Mark's coffee out on to the verandah. It was the last time Mark saw him. "I reckon a man's got to be born in it to like a dump like this," he said. "Thank you, sir. If you get sick of this hole come up to Blackpool and stop at *The George*, and I'll look after you."

About the middle of the afternoon Mark strolled out to see the town and to get his bearings. It struck him as a pleasant little town, rather sleepy, and obviously not built on any plan. It was a haphazard accretion of houses, cottages, and shops. He noted that the market-place (roughly rectangular, each side being about eighty yards) was the oldest part of the town, and that spreading out from this ancient nucleus (parts of it dating back to the fourteenth century) were very irregular concentric circles of less and less old buildings, until by the Common there was a fringe of modern bungalows. The church did not, of course, conform to this architectural pageant of history, having been built, as was customary, about a furlong or so from the contemporary dwelling-houses; and centuries passed before the tide of new building slowly crept up to it, surrounded it, and spread beyond.

He was passing one of the bungalows by the Common. It had a large and well-kept garden, and coming down the path among the profusion of early autumn flowers was a young girl. He pulled up short to watch her, but pretending an intense interest in the flowers. Never before had he seen a girl who so strongly appealed to his sense of beauty. She seemed too pretty to be true. She opened the garden gate and, apparently quite unaware of his presence, set off quickly towards the town, while he watched appreciatively her slim figure, graceful carriage, and beautiful legs. Everything about her seemed perfection; not anywhere could he discern a flaw. What, he wondered, would her voice be like: would that spoil her? Or would her skin not bear a closer view? Or her hair be coarse, her lashes scanty? There must be flaws; there always were; it was only in young children that one occasionally found perfection: that immature loveliness that puberty always seemed to kill. This young woman who had now passed out of sight could not possibly be as perfect as she had appeared. It must have been a trick of the light and the background of flowers. But he intended to find out. There came stealing over him the conviction that he was going to marry this girl. Love at first sight. As the trite phrase slipped into his mind it started a mildly ironic grin upon his lips. Was he, a hard-boiled newspaperman with seven years in Fleet Street behind him, to give harbourage in his mind to such novelet-

tish slop? Love at first sight! The girl he was going to marry! Good God! He suddenly and quite unaccountably thought of his father and of his two marriages, with their strange meetings, abrupt decisions, and brief courtships. Was it a family characteristic? He grimaced, shrugged his shoulders and turned away. As he did so the sun glinted on the gate, and he turned back and saw it bore a brass plate with *Dr. F. H. Heldar, Physician and Surgeon*, on it, Heldar? Heldar? The name struck a familiar note, but he dredged his mind without result. He wondered if the girl were Dr. Heldar's daughter and what her name was. He tried over alphabetically a score of girls' names to see how they chimed with Heldar. The thought came to him: Might not she be Dr. Heldar's wife? But he dismissed it immediately. She was not married. Without rhyme or reason he was prepared to swear she was not. He knew she wasn't. There had been something virginal, untouched, about her which made the idea of her being a wife ludicrous, even slightly offensive, almost obscene. Further, he felt that she was not even engaged; that as yet no man had meant anything to her at all. Not that it mattered very much. However many young men were fluttering about her paying court did not trouble his mind at all, nor if there were already one favoured above the rest. They were but shadows; she was real; he, Mark Passmore, was real: the others were nothing at all; they entered this play which, he now felt sure, Life was about to put upon the stage as no more than faint remote noises heard in the wings. He set off with rapid strides across the Common towards the river; some urge caused him to increase his pace violently, to thrust himself forward as if he ran a race. It was more than three hours later when he returned to *The Royal*, tired, dusty, his thoughts centred on nothing more romantic than the bath of cold water into which he would presently slip his sweating body.

But the girl was not the only thing of beauty (*his* beauty, for beauty has Pentecostal tongues) he had encountered that afternoon. It was on his way back as he was nearing the scattered bungalows upon the fringe of the Common that he had come upon *The White Cottage*, with its small velvet lawns, its garden, its atmosphere of quiet, and its indefinable air of loveliness. It had been designed and built by an artist.

Mark was later to hear that story. All he knew now was that it appealed to him tremendously, and that a board outside said that it was to be sold furnished.

He sat that night on the balcony outside his bedroom smoking a last pipe before turning in. The night was still and cloudless; the sea's faint plashing was agreeably nostalgic; overhead was strung out the incredible splendour of the Milky Way. He had dined well; a half-bottle of Richebourg 1929 had pleasantly accompanied the meal, and a liqueur brandy with his coffee had added that thaumaturgic touch which gave a richer taste to his tobacco.

The influence of the wine was still upon him. Never had a summer night seemed more beautiful. Inevitably his mood became drowsily reminiscent and he reviewed his life in a slowly pacing and slightly misty pageant.

There began presently to creep over him, yet not altogether unpleasantly, that vague feeling of dissatisfaction with life which had frequented his mind of late. But not for a long while so strongly as now. He remembered that the last occasion it had moved him with such poignancy was during those few days at Breford in May, and he smiled faintly as he recollected what, during his journey home, he had concluded had been its provenance: his father's domestic happiness; the charm and attraction of Vivien; the glowing face of the young bride as the taxi drove off: for these had built up a picture of married love, of physical union, whose contemplation had stirred him to an intense desire, the desire from which, he believed, sprang that vague dissatisfaction with his life.

His pipe was smoked out; grew slowly cool. He closed his eyes and there was painted vividly upon his retina the image of the girl coming down the garden path among the autumn flowers. He held the image a long while, but it slowly evaded his control and faded, to be followed by an image of *The White Cottage*, an image less transient, perhaps because he had stood so long looking at the cottage. But at last that image too passed. He sat up so abruptly that his pipe slipped from his teeth. He knew what he was going to do; knew it so conclusively that there was no need for the weighing of pros and cons. It was settled. There had been a weighing of pros

and cons and it had lasted several hours; but it had not been the work of his conscious mind.

He would resign from *The Morning Courier*. He would buy *The White Cottage*. He would marry the girl. He would do the first two on the morrow; the third as soon as he could, and apparently the Passmores had a way with them in such affairs. Clearly his father had, and was he not as good a man? He had no intention of living in *The White Cottage* in idleness. Not in the least. While he had been literary editor of *The Courier* he had done a good deal of book reviewing, mostly of novels; he had thought the great majority of them trash, and had wondered how they had found a publisher and would, it seemed, find a public. He had been quite sure he could write better novels himself, and had indeed written three parts of one (*Rain Before Seven*) and had then grown dissatisfied with it and put it aside. Here was work for him: to rewrite what he had written and then finish the story. And perhaps write a sequel. Or compose a trilogy. Then there was a biography of Robert Bloomfield, a book he had long promised himself he would write one day when he'd the time. He'd have the time now. Everything seemed to be fitting in like the pieces of a mosaic. He realised suddenly how utterly tired of Fleet Street he was. They had been good, those seven years, and he would not have missed them. But he had slowly been getting into a groove. He would get out of it. He wanted a change, a wider scope. Here was his chance; of that and much else. He had, he believed, no illusions about his abilities. *Rain Before Seven* was no incompletely masterpiece. He was not and never would be a great writer. There was not hiding under his bushel a new Dickens or Thackeray or even a Trollope. But he could write a competent readable novel; and a biography of Bloomfield not without perhaps some slight value for students. But his chief target now was the girl; the rest but minor affairs at the most. After they were married he would make other decisions about his career, with his wife's counsel to assist his deliberations.

### Chapter Three

#### PERSONS AND THINGS

MARK wrote the next morning to Lord Gravenhurst, who in his reply said, ". . . but why not take a year's holiday, with or without pay as you prefer? At the end of the year you can then review the situation. Fleet Street might seem after a year in your rural solitudes to be a more desirable place than it does now. At first I wondered if my animadversions on your abdication story had anything to do with your desire to leave us, but on consideration I am sure it had not. In any case I hope we have not seen the last of your work in *The Courier*, but that is more Mr. Massey's province than mine. . . ."

Mark wrote again, saying he had no objection to calling his resignation a year's holiday without pay, but added that he did not think it in the least likely that he would ever return to Fleet Street. He wrote also to Mr. Massey, whose reply expressed regret at Mark's decision, and then went on, ". . . but I hope this does not mean a complete break in your connection with *The Courier*. Our columns will always be open to you. Writing novels does not necessarily rule out other literary activities, and many novelists find occasional refreshment in contributing to the Press. If at any time you should stumble across a good story I feel that you will send it along: once a newspaperman, always a newspaperman, isn't it? . . ."

While this correspondence was passing he called upon the house agent in the High Street whose board was in front of *The White Cottage*. What, Mark asked, was the price?

"The house and furniture three thousand pounds."

"And without the furniture?"

"It is not for sale without the furniture."

"That is rather unusual," Mark said.

Mr. Tweedy nodded. "Extremely so. I've never heard of such a stipulation before."

"It is a stipulation?"

"Absolutely. That is one of the reasons the house has stood vacant for over three years."

"The furniture is the difficulty?"

"Yes. Not that it isn't good. You shall see for yourself. But people, when buying, prefer house and furniture separately rather than a furnished house. I don't really know why they should. Just happens they do. But the furniture of *The White Cottage* is more than mere furniture: it is part of the house. Er—like a nut's shell and kernel," with a dry smile. "That is why the late owner stipulated that the house should not be sold without the furniture, the shell without the kernel. He was an artist, a Mr. Lionel Crickmay, and designed both house and furniture, I understand. I did not come to Seathorpe till after his death. There are caretakers, man and wife; and a jobbing gardener attends every day. You will have gathered that from the garden. The inside has been as well looked after."

Mark nodded. "I should like to see over it immediately. May I have a permit from you?"

"I will accompany you. There is one thing I ought to tell you."

"Yes?"

"There was a violent death in the house. A suicide, in fact. Some people feel rather strongly about such things"—glancing at Mark over the top of his spectacles, which he wore low down on his nose.

Mark smiled. "I don't think that will influence my decision." He waited a moment, wondering if the agent would be a little more explanatory, but as the man remained silent, evidently not wishing to discuss the matter further, he went on, "If you can come now, my car is outside and we'll run around."

*The White Cottage* was as enchanting within as without. It was not a furnished house or a house and furniture, but a perfect dwelling-place. It gave the effect of having been created as a whole, and Mark presently found himself thinking that it would be difficult to imagine it without the furniture, or conversely. Inspecting it was a formality. He had already decided, and within half an hour of their return to the office of Mr. Tweedy the title-deeds were his and his cheque in the agent's safe. The caretakers, a Mr. and Mrs. Fossett, would be ready to leave within forty-eight hours, but Mark did not

propose to enter into possession until he had installed a staff, or had at least engaged a cook-housekeeper, and until then he would stay on at *The Royal*.

During the next few days he 'prowled' (as he would have said, being fond of the word) about Seathorpe, making himself familiar with the little town, noting the names on or over the shop windows and trying, a trick of his, to fit human beings to the names. What sort of men for example were A. Rust, Draper; J. Scrivener, Butcher; T. Irons, Baker; F. Ogle, Chemist; and P. Swarthout, Greengrocer? A visit to the shops sometimes supplied an immediate answer. He was a collector of odd names and was disappointed to find so few, although Rumble, Milliner, pleased him. But his eyes were less sharp for such things than usual, being hopefully engaged watching for the girl. Yet not once during those few days did he so much as catch a glimpse of the girl he purposed to marry. It seemed to him an extraordinary and exasperating thing in a small town of fewer than five thousand people (but he forgot to allow for the thousand-odd visitors) that *anyone* could remain unseen for three or four days, but that someone who was being—well, hunted was hardly the word; eagerly watched for, should elude notice was barely credible. Could it be that she was avoiding him? He dismissed the notion as bosh. It was very doubtful, he sincerely believed, whether she had noticed him the other day, and she would therefore be totally unaware of his existence.

But if one love failed him the other was already his own, and was there waiting for his delight. He could not keep away from *The White Cottage*. No day passed that did not find him there, if for no more than a stroll in the garden and to exchange a few words with Tom Palmer, the jobbing gardener who came every day either in the morning or the afternoon.

But one morning Mark had the whole place to himself. The caretakers had gone for good and Tom Palmer was not coming till the afternoon. As he walked slowly along the paths of the garden smoking his pipe and contemplating the beauty all about him with that nostalgia, melancholy yet sweet and enchanting, which seems to accompany such moments, he was suddenly aware of being watched, and looking up from a profusion of roses saw a man leaning on

the fence around *The White Cottage* and regarding him with obvious interest.

The newcomer nodded, smiled, and said, "Lovely sight, isn't it? Lucky man."

Mark smiled. "I rather think I am."

"I'm Madd," and then, catching Mark's sudden look of surprise, he went on, "Two d's: Madd. M-A-double-D, Madd. Short for Madderson." And then, with a mock-heroic gesture, "My God! it strikes no chord of memory! A misfire!"

At this Mark laughed. "I certainly ought to have known it, for we ran one of your strips for years. Still do."

"And who's we?"

"*The Morning Courier*."

"You must have a nice post if it runs to this," with a sweep of his hand towards *The White Cottage*.

"Oh, I've retired."

"Good God! is money made so fast now in the Street?"

"Resigned's the word I should have used. My name's Passmore."

"Why, that's fine. I know your stuff. Like it. I mean our being neighbours. That's my shack," waving his hand towards a bungalow about a hundred yards away: "*Thetwins*; nice little place, but not a patch on yours. Didn't know Crickmay, I suppose? Tragic business. Built it out of my first big winner. *Thetwins*, I mean. Hence the name. Don't twig? But then you don't remember what my first big winner was."

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Of course you don't. It was nearly twenty years ago; the first year after the War. I was thirty; a bit knocked about bodily and all to pieces—er—spiritually, is it? And at a loose end; spent my gratuity. Only thing I could do was draw, but what I was drawing just then the editors wouldn't buy. Then one night I sat in *The Shades* drinking Old Wenlock ale (lovely stuff), and suddenly I got an inspiration. Must have been the Old Wenlock. It was the real authentic sort of inspiration which appears whole and complete to the last gaiter button. That's how you know it's inspiration. If you have to fiddle about with it it's bogus. The real thing's ready made for you. It was for a strip; my first and one of the earliest in this country; adventures of a couple of harum-scarum kids,

twins; little more than babes; the whole thing was complete and with their names: Bibb and Tucker. It put me on the map; inspirations always do; they never go wrong; never let you down. It ran in the good old *Journal* for five years, and by then I was doing a dozen. Seventeen years ago I built *Thetwins*, and here I've been living for the last ten years. I still draw; just enough to keep me out of mischief. I imagine you're not proposing to be completely idle." His eyes twinkled. "Perhaps you've come to little old Seathorpe to write a great novel."

Mark laughed. "I am writing a novel. Not a great one. In fact, it's so bad that as soon as I've settled in I'm going to start rewriting it."

"Why not chuck it away and start another? Rewriting must be a howling bore. I never alter drawings. I chuck 'em away and do another. Hate piggling about. Write a novel with Seathorpe as background. It's a grand background for a novel, nothing ever happens; everything is half asleep; and it's full of a rich assortment of characters. I was born here and educated here, and loafed about here till I was twenty without impressing Seathorpe. And after I'd made my hit and Madd strips were known all over the world I returned to Seathorpe, but my native town remained unimpressed. You can't impress an East Anglian with literary or artistic success; only material success, and that of the most solid. We get all sorts of eminent gents in the artistic, literary, and musical world here holiday-making, but Seathorpe isn't interested. But when Harrison the car millionaire stayed at *The Royal* for a couple of days Seathorpe was in a flutter of excitement and there was talk of sending him an address of welcome. So you can go ahead and write a dozen masterpieces in peace and quiet; no one here will ever turn to look at you in the street; most of the towns-men will never have heard that you write at all, and if you live here twenty years you'll still be a newcomer."

"Things do happen occasionally," Mark said; "so I gathered from Mr. Tweedy, who said it was his duty to inform me that there'd been a tragedy at *The White Cottage*, but did not expatriate."

"Crickmay. Yes. But he was a newcomer and a foreigner. Lionel Crickmay. Know his work?"

"No. I don't even know his name."

"He didn't exhibit in England (some quarrel or other with the R.A.), but he did in all the big Continental and United States shows. He's generally considered pretty tops, I believe. Not that I really know anything about painting. I'm only a cheap-jack draughtsman. You knew he designed and built *The White Cottage* and everything in it?"

"Yes."

"And all for a woman."

"I didn't know that. His wife?"

"His daughter. Freda. His wife died when Freda was born, and Crickmay brought her up and took her about with him wherever he went. He was passionately fond of her. Never married again and seems to have centred his life round the girl. He was not a great deal older than she was as years go, and he kept his youthful figure and his fondness for games; and mentally, and I suppose aesthetically, he was a generation ahead of his time, so he was able to enter into all her interests as if he'd been a contemporary. Rarely can the gap between the generations have been so almost completely bridged. He made (made is the right word) *The White Cottage* for her as a gift for her twenty-first birthday. And as soon as it was ready they came to live here. Three months later, driving down from London late at night with Freda beside him, Crickmay hit a tree and turned the car over into a ditch. Freda was killed, he barely scratched. Three days after the inquest he shot himself here in his bedroom. I believe there's a hole in the wainscoting now. His will stipulated that *The White Cottage* and furniture must be sold as a whole."

Mark nodded. "So I understand."

"Seathorpe took the tragedy calmly. They'd never cottoned to Crickmay. They thought such fondness for a daughter a bit queer and a sign that he'd a screw loose. Also he'd kept himself pretty aloof, and Freda didn't seem to hanker after making social contacts in Seathorpe. Not surprising, perhaps, for her life had been spent in the world's big cities where her father had mixed with all the most intelligent and gifted people. Seathorpe would not scintillate in comparison. But perhaps they'd have been more approachable later. We hadn't

a chance to learn. I spoke to him occasionally. Made it my business to stroll over." With a grin, "No one could call me stand-offish."

Mark smiled. "What was the girl like?"

"Not pretty, but small and attractive, and I should say a crackerjack for brains. Probably took after her mother physically, for Crickmay was a lanky, angular, sandy fellow."

"Was that before or after the Gudgeon affair?"

Madderson chuckled. "So you know about that, eh? That was the year before."

"Two pretty good consecutive years for a place where nothing ever happens."

"There's been nothing since. But the Seathorpians are an ever-present joy and need no happenings to gild them. But if I begin on them I'll be here all day. Look here, come over and have lunch with us and meet the family. I met my wife less than a month after that flash of inspiration in *The Shades*, and in another month we were married. I hate waiting about for things. If a thing's worth having it's best had at once. That's how it is with me. My wife cured my spiritual sickness on our honeymoon (a week at Southend), and eight months later continued her constructive work by presenting me with a daughter, Alison. That's the family. You'll find a boy there; Sebastian Dalmain (believe it or not); but called Sam; he'll probably tell you why Sebastian; or Alison will. He's in the R.A.F., and he and Alison are proposing to get married in the spring. He's the world's— Good God! there's our gong. That'll be Sam beating it. He's no ear for music. Come along over and meet us. We're an intelligent family."

Mrs. Eliot Madderson was a comely woman, slim, fresh-complexioned, and very bright-eyed. She looked very little older than Alison, who had her father's grey eyes, fine features, and square jaw, softened in her. She was pretty and had an air of perfect self-assurance. The young R.A.F. man was shortish, strongly built, with startlingly light blue eyes and a wide, humorous mouth.

At the introductions Madderson said, "Sam's the world's super-pessimist," and was apparently about to go into details when Alison said, "Tell Mr. Passmore why you were called Sebastian and then we'll have that out of the way."

Sam grinned engagingly. He seemed, Mark thought, a most engaging youngster. "Parents first met at Sebastian while holiday-making in the States. Simple, isn't it? And silly. But it might have been worse. Florida, for example. Florida Dalmain. Bound to be shortened to Flo. Flo Dalmain. What other career for a man with a name like that than a band leader?"

"Don't be absurd, Sam," Alison said. "You know you've no ear. You're almost tone deaf."

"Exactly. The first essential for the post."

The meal had by now begun, Sam and Alison having both refused cocktails.

"That's why you're such a pessimist, Sam," Madderson said.

"I'm a realist. And all realists are pessimists in the opinion of optimists."

Alison looked over to Mark with a smile. "Sam's determined to produce his bee, so we'd better get it over. Go on, darling. The world—" pausing on the word.

Sam grinned and, looking over to Mark, said, "Have you read *The End of the World*, by Geoffrey Dennis?"

"Yes," Mark said; "a beautiful book."

"I daresay, but I'm no judge. But Dennis only plays around with possibilities. Now I read a book some five or six years ago which went straight to the bull's-eye. As literature it may have been all punk. I don't know. But for facts it was tops. It was a tale of the future. The world was divided into two factions, and the leader of one faction, to demonstrate his power and intimidate the other boss, threw the moon out of its orbit. This so upset the balance of our planetary system that the earth was sucked into the sun and destroyed."

"And you think something like that is likely to happen some time or other?"

"I am certain that the end of the world is near. That it will happen before the end of the present century, and that man will bring it about. I expect you've seen the Press advertising of some brand of American religion run by a Judge Rutherford whose slogan is: 'Millions now living will never die.' Alter that nonsense to 'Millions now living will see the end of the world,' and you have a scientific fact. Already science has in its hands almost sufficient power to do the trick. In another ten years, say twenty at the outside, that power will

be in some man's possession; in some nation's possession; possibly in the possession of more than one nation. Will that power be used? Can we doubt it for a moment? What has been the history of mankind? When the genus *Homo* produced the species *Homo sapiens*—that is to say, when humanity appeared, it contained within itself the seed of its own destruction and the destruction of its habitat; that seed was human nature. Human nature does not essentially change. It can, in comfortable, peaceful times, acquire a patina, a veneer, a gloss, which camouflages it, but which it can shed with lightning rapidity. Human nature is truculent, quarrelsome, spiteful, envious, covetous, and revengeful. It has, of course, many admirable qualities. So has a tiger: courage, fortitude, and love of its offspring, for example. But a tiger is a ravening beast. So also is humanity. Nothing can now prevent humanity from possessing itself of power capable of destroying the globe and everything on it; and humanity's qualities of human nature being what they are, the annihilation of this planet is not only inevitable but near."

"Hosegood would agree with you," Madderson chuckled.

"Never mind Hosegood," Sam said imperturbably; "if we drag him in we shall all drown in a welter of anecdote."

"I remember a short story, I think by Wells," Mrs. Madderson said, "which began: 'Man has lived in vain.' You think so too, Sam."

"I don't think anything of the sort. What bosh! I am sure that man has reached the end of his existence; but 'lived in vain' is rot. Taking things all round, he's had a pretty good time and done quite a lot. I think most people would be sorry to have missed life. There's eating and drinking and love-making, and music and birds singing, and dawns and sunsets. Think of all the beauty man has enjoyed and all the simply pleasurable things, the sensuous things. Haven't they made life worth while? And mankind has always had these and enjoyed them. Why, then, pretend, now that the play is over, that mankind has lived in vain? If man has enjoyed life that is a complete justification for man's existence."

"Why create man at all," Mrs. Madderson said, "if he is to come to so sudden and wasteful an end?"

"Wasteful begs the question," Sam said, with his engaging

wide smile; "and who created man, anyway? I thought even our bishops agreed nowadays that he was evolved, and that since matter is indestructible the universe has always been in existence in some form or other and so the necessity to postulate a creator vanishes. But your implied assumption that because a thing is transient its existence is to be deplored is all my eye. The rose is transient. And purposeless. Stephen Phillips wrote 'as rich and purposeless as is the rose.' Should we, then, deny ourselves the loveliness of a rose?"

"But roses seed, Sam," Madderson said; "and so bloom again."

"The seed produces another rose. The dead rose doesn't bloom again. Man seeds too and produces sons and daughters. That is all man's immortality amounts to."

"And that is now over?" Mark smiled.

"Exactly."

"I thought we were getting married," Alison said.

"Oh, there'll be time for that!" with a grin.

"Your children will just be in time to see the balloon go up, apparently," Madderson said.

"I'm inclined to think there ought not to be any more children," Sam said.

"If women believe your bunkum, Sam, there wouldn't be," Madderson laughed.

"There would be," Alison said. "Women have always been the victims of their emotions."

"And men's lust!" Sam chuckled. "Man has always exploited woman for pleasure or profit. Isn't that the old lay that has lost its meaning and the new theme song that never had one? I'm only joking, darling. Man has always given woman a dirty deal, unless he wanted something from her."

"Well, it's true," Alison said. "Men prate about chivalry and work pregnant women in coalmines. They talk with reverent voices and upturned eyes of motherhood, but how much have they ever cared about the agonies of childbirth? They have spent much more money and ingenuity on patent tobacco pipes, safety-razors, and cures for baldness than on the alleviation of women's pain. They talk smugly of sex equality, but how many believe in it? They are prepared to admit as a principle the right of equal pay for equal work, but

they never pay it. They pretend, of course, that the woman's work is not equal to a man's in quality; or, where it is merely a question of amount, in quantity. And so we have such comic situations as a male Medical Officer of Health, holding only the L.R.C.P. diploma, receiving a salary of £1,500 a year; while his female assistant, holding such diplomas as M.D., D.Sc., and D.Ph., receives and is considered lucky to get £750. That is an actual case. In Middlesex."

"But hang it all, Alison," her father said, "women have a vote; they outnumber men; they could swamp the elections, run the country, and redress all their grievances; why don't they?"

"Because they're the victims of their own bodies. Nature has given them as raw a deal as man. Just at that period in life when the intellect is about to bloom and expand a girl's body begins to be preoccupied with preparations for carrying on the race, and this physical preoccupation absorbs the vitality which would have fed mental energy. Later, when she should be playing her part in running the country, she is caught in the net of her body, is producing children and running a house. If men had to do that just how much time and energy would they have left to swamp the elections (whatever that means), run the country, and redress their grievances?"

"Talking of grievances," Madderson said, "what are you going to do about servants, Mr. Passmore? Or is Tom Palmer going to cook for you? Have you twigged the hammer and sickle in his lapel? He's a fiery red. Are you keeping him on?"

"I think so. He seems to have done a pretty good job."

"Yes; he's a good gardener. A bit truculent and inclined to confuse truculence with independence and self-respect. He's a bit hazy, too, over *meum* and *tuum*. I don't mean he pinches things, but you'll find if you don't watch out that your mower, for example, will have a habit of being missing and turning up at Dr. Heldorf's or Mr. Dauncey's; while Heldorf's roller and Dauncey's spray will unaccountably appear on your lawns."

"Aren't we, by the by, playing tennis with Dick and Lesley this afternoon?" Alison said to Sam, who nodded and said, "Plenty of time"; while Alison, glancing over to Mark, added,

"Lesley and Dick Heldar. Dick's at Cambridge. And Lesley—the prettiest girl in Seathorpe."

Before Mark could think of some way of keeping the conversation upon so exciting a topic Mr. Madderson said, "You must have a good housekeeper who is a first-rate cook. That's a prime necessity. Now who is there, darling?" looking over to his wife.

"There's Mrs. Paradock."

"Yes; there's Mrs. Paradock."

Mark watched them exchange glances—amused glances, he thought. Alison was smiling. He waited.

"The fact is, Mr. Passmore," Mrs. Madderson said, "Mrs. Paradock is an extremely efficient person and a fine cook, but she is—er—shall we say temperamental?"

"Or more simply," Madderson said, "she has a penchant for an occasional binge. Gin, I believe."

"What does occasional mean?" Mark asked.

"Not more than three or four times a year."

"And what does it amount to? D.T.s?"

"Good Lord, no." Madderson said. "She merely has an evening out; returns well lit up; is inclined to be saucy if reproved; sleeps it off; is tearful and apologetic next morning; and thereafter is her efficient self till the next time."

"And is she really good?"

"Excellent, isn't she, Jane?"

His wife nodded. "And quite a wit in her dry way. I think you might do a lot worse. I know she's out of a post at present."

"That was her last binge," Madderson laughed.

"When was that?" Mark asked.

"About the middle of July, I should say."

"That should give me a clear six weeks or so," Mark said. with a smile. "When can I see her?"

"I'll see her and then let you know. If you decide to engage her, any other staff you propose to engage I should leave to her. She knows everybody; and their worth to a farthing."

Alison and Sam now went off to the Heldars' for tennis and Madderson took Mark into his garden, where they sat and talked and smoked. Madderson was so ingenuously inquisitive, yet so frank about himself and his affairs and so agree-

able with it all, that Mark found himself talking as freely as if they had been friends of long standing. They discussed Breford and Brixham, both well known to Madderson, and when presently Mark mentioned Lourdes Madderson said, "What most moved me at Lourdes was the illuminated Cross on the mountain-top seen by night at a distance. But I get all my impressions and sensations visually; well, nearly all; all the memorable ones. Did you see any miracles?"

"No."

"I saw a young man carried into the piscine and walk out. I didn't hear any details." He smiled. "Heldar says the cures at Lourdes have nothing to do with Lourdes. They could and would occur anywhere; that it's partly auto-suggestion and partly mass-suggestion, and that any aggregation of people would serve the same purpose; the crowd at a soccer match, for example. You must meet Heldar. You'll like him. What have you been doing with yourself since you arrived?"

"Just prowling around and getting my bearings."

"Get as far as *Freyne Court*?"

Mark nodded.

"See Sir Jack?"

"No."

"He's often knocking about in the town. Queer you've not run across him. I should say he's a very decent sort of young fellow when you get through the crust, a crust made by twenty-odd years in a Sydney slum."

"I wonder if that's true. It was never authenticated. And no one really knows what part of Australia he hails from."

"The county element is inclined to be sniffy about him. But he's indubitably a Borlase, and Borlase is the oldest East Anglian family, so it comes rather awkward. As a plebeian I find it all a bit footling. But they'll accept him sooner or later. An ancient title may be sneezed at perhaps, but not when it has fifty thousand a year attached to it. It's good he's a bachelor. There's going to be some fun presently watching the matrimonial scramble. But already there's a rumour creeping about that the Larrikin Baronet has his eye on the prettiest young girl in Seathorpe."

Mark sat up. "Do you mean Miss Heldar?"

Madderson roared with laughter. "Good God, no! Lesley is

the prettiest girl in Seathorpe, but she's in a class apart. I was referring to the rank and file, and the prettiest of them is little Amy Watson. What makes it so dam' good is that Amy is a fisherman's daughter. But she's tops for looks and is a really fine kid." He chuckled. "Make a grand Lady Borlase. I always think this title business bosh, but there's fun to be got out of it sometimes. You can't see *Freyne Court* from here, but you can from your place, I believe. That's the trees."

Mark nodded.

"Know *Bevis Hall*?" Madderson went on.

"Is that a man or a house?"

Madderson laughed. "Both. That blot over there," pointing to a large, ugly stucco house about a mile away, "is *Bevis Hall*, and inside it is the man, Luther Essenhigh."

"All alone?"

"There's his manservant Jackson; that's all. It's rare to see Essenhigh about the town. I remember only three occasions in the five or six years he's been here."

"Is he an old man? an invalid?"

"Middle-aged. He's not an invalid. Perhaps something of a valetudinarian. And a bit of a mystery. No one really knows anything about him except that he's a musician; or anyhow very fond of music, to judge by the loud music frequently heard coming from the house. And apparently not the radio. Odd sort of music."

"Odd?"

"Well, different. But I'm no musician. You must ask Alison about it. She says it's magnificent. And then there have been the extraordinary packing-cases arriving at the *Hall* from time to time. Too big for radio sets and too small for grand pianos."

"Television sets, perhaps. Is he known to be interested in wireless?"

"He's not *known* to be interested in anything, and," with a smile, "he's not the sort of bloke you can ask. The vicar called on him once apparently to ask why he didn't attend church, and received a rebuff which has kept him away from *Bevis Hall* ever since. But the Rev. Xavier evidently nosed around before he was ejected (yes, it virtually amounted to that), and he is supposed to have said that from what he saw and heard

Essenhigh was using a wireless transmitter. Of course, that started all sorts of fatheaded yarns on the strength of Essenhigh's name. You know the sort of thing: secret wireless station transmitting to Germany."

"He never goes to church?"

"Not since he's been at Seathorpe. But his manservant Jackson redresses the balance: he's a devout Baptist and a regular attendant at the Tabernacle in Queen Street. He's a grim-faced, taciturn sort of fellow and not to be pumped; and being a strict abstainer there's no chance of applying the pub pump-handle, usually so efficacious." He pointed over towards the church. "That tall red house: Prosper Fellowes lives there. He's a naturalist; writes books on wild life and occasionally broadcasts. Perhaps you've heard him."

"No. Music's the only thing I listen to on the radio. I'd as soon read the Bowdlerised Shakespeare as listen to an edited wireless talk. That is why the quality is so bad, I imagine: no writer of any standing would submit his script to the editorial scissors, especially when those scissors are wielded for the purpose of suppressing all views objectionable to the Church, the State, or the monarchy. A religious discussion which omits the atheist's standpoint is just puerile and leads people to draw the conclusion that the Church is afraid of the atheist's case because it cannot confute it. Similarly with politics. As I say, I don't listen to talks; but if I did I am quite sure I shouldn't hear one devoted to the case for communism. Instead of being a source of enlightenment (and it might have been the greatest the world has ever known or dreamed of), the B.B.C. has joined hands with Church and State to suppress all opinion inimical to their interests."

Madderson grinned. "Naturally. You don't expect them to nourish vipers in their bosom to bite them to death. You seem a bit het up about religion and politics. They don't bother me. I go to church and I vote Tory. Everybody does here. Why argue? What's the odds? I settled all that years ago. I really don't care twopence whether the Church is right or wrong or whether the Tories are. It's all a toss-up. So choose one side or the other and then stop thinking about it. I like Fellowes. He's a bit bumptious and encyclopædic, but he does know a heck of a lot about wild animals, and he's a decent

sort behind his outworks, which are a bit arrogant and patronising. That dumpy horror with the flat roof and cupolas (it was designed by our own architect Rennie) is *The Gentlemen's Club*."

Mark smiled. "The waiter at *The Royal* mentioned it. Is that really its name?"

Madderson laughed and nodded. "And I'm on the Committee. You must join. You'll get good billiards, good bridge, good talk, and good liquor there. I'll put your name forward at the next meeting if you like, and then it's all cut and dried and you'll be invited to apply for admission to membership. At the moment we're much exercised over the case of the Larrikin Baronet. Shall we or shall we not invite him to apply? We shall be voting on it at our next meeting, and the ayes will have it, I think. Membership of the club will give you the opportunity of meeting the sort of people you'll find congenial (there's the other sort there, of course, but you can avoid them). We don't call it *The Gentlemen's Club* now, simply *The Club*; but the Committee (on which I'm the only 'foreigner') insists upon strict interpretation of the founders' intention: that the club should be for gentlemen. Of course this leads to the choicest, or silliest, situations, to say nothing of anomalous ones. Since there is no authoritative definition of a gentleman, the founders had to make arbitrary decisions in drafting their rules—e.g., no tradesman was a gentleman, but when a tradesman became Mayor (as one often did) he was a gentleman ex-officio. Other equally grotesque decisions were that doctors were gentlemen, but not dentists. Veterinary surgeons were also not gentlemen, but one of our two local vets was a Dauncey, and Dauncey is the next oldest family to Borlase, and so Dauncey comes in on his family. Elementary schoolmasters were not gentlemen, but the headmaster and staff of St. Michael's prep. school were sufficiently Poonah. And so on and so forth. All dam' snobbery and all dam' silly. But ignore it, as most of us do. It's a good club. If you don't join, then about the only place you can meet congenial fellows is *The Ship* pub, and the amenities there are not to be compared with *The Club's*. The present Mayor, by the way, is Mr. Arthur Creed; that's his house by the power-station, the one with green gables. He's a pleasant little cove and his wife

Lottie's a good sort. He's a men's outfitter; one of the richest men in Seathorpe, and one of the few Master Brian Knox-Strangeways did not attempt to milk, probably because there was no daughter and nice old Lottie is no oil-painting.

"Met the Vicar yet? You will do so; as soon as you've settled in. The Rev. Xavier Cunninghamame is not going to miss a new parishioner, especially one who looks as if he might be good for something handsome for the Church Restoration Fund. I suppose you are Church of England?"

Mark laughed. "We'll let it go at that. I'm certainly not a Catholic and I'm not a Nonconformist."

"That'll be good enough for the vicar. His wattles blow out at the very name of Papisher. We haven't a Catholic church here; just an oratory. Father Lampard's the priest. He looks just like the jolly monk of legend. Cunninghamame made a rich marriage as a young man. His wife's a mousy little thing named Madge. They've one child, a daughter, Sybil, who's also a mousy little thing and is going to marry the curate, Cyril Staines. Or rather the Rev. Cyril (who is big and good-looking and very popular with the women) is going to marry Sybil for the sake of her fortune; just as the Rev. Xavier married Madge; and Sybil's married life will be the same punishment her mother's has been. Sometimes I'm inclined to think there's something to be said for Hosegood's opinion of humanity. I was going to tell you about Hosegood at lunch, but Sam put on the closure. Perhaps you've already heard of him."

"No."

"Well, he's a card. He's Mortimer Hosegood, and he made a pile (millions, the story goes) out of breakfast foods. He's a food reformer and a vegetarian. Rum, that."

"Why?"

Madderson pointed to a belt of trees running along the western horizon about five or six miles away. "That's Hosegood's private Zoo, and it's supposed to be one of the finest in the world. When I said rum I meant that it's always struck me as rum a vegetarian should run a Zoo. But Hosegood's a rum bird altogether. On Bank Holidays and on July 4th and July 14th he throws the Zoo open to the public. And it's free. On these occasions there's always one cage attracts crowds. It

contains a good-looking young man and a pretty young woman, both fashionably dressed and seen reading. A large red-lettered white board at the bottom of the cage reads:

Genus: *Homo*  
Species: *Homo Sapiens*  
*Male and Female.*

WARNING (it's in huge capitals)

*Do not approach too close to the bars. This handsome creature is the most treacherous, the most bloodthirsty, the most cruel, and the most cunning of all the animals of the earth."*

Mark laughed. "Rather good. A case could be made out for its truth; just as an equally strong one could be made out for the converse. He sounds a genial soul."

"He's, as I say, a rum bird, but there's usually more than a bit of plain sense in his rumness. On the days when he throws open the Zoo notices are posted outside: 'Adults admitted only if accompanied by children.' Good God! here's Alice with the tea-things. We've been gassing nearly three hours. Or rather I have. You can't refuse to stay to tea now it's here." The maid having laid the table, Mrs. Madderson came out to preside, and said, "I hope Eliot's not been boring you, Mr. Passmore."

"I've been giving him the lowdown on some of the eminents or, rather, the rummer ones. I was just telling him about Hosegood."

"Did you tell him about the parrots?"

"O good Lord, no! This is really prime," turning to Mark. "Hosegood is a peppery fellow. Most vegetarians seem to be in a chronic state of choler, which proves, at least to me, that their munch doesn't agree with them. Well, Hosegood was in Seathorpe one afternoon shortly after he'd built the Zoo. He was driving himself, and in the High Street a car pulled too sharply in to the kerb and, according to Hosegood, would have caused a smash but for his skilful driving. Hosegood lost his temper and swore so lustily and richly at the driver that Constable Dyer took his name and address, and he was

later charged before the local bench of magistrates with using obscene language. The Mayor, a grocer named Pipe, a Strict Baptist, fined him ten guineas and five guineas costs, told him he had made a degrading exhibition of himself and that it was necessary to teach him the lesson that profanity would not be tolerated in public places among decent people.

"About six months later the bench and about three-score of the other local notables received an invitation to a luncheon at the Zoo on the occasion of the opening of the new parrot-house by the Earl of Frostenden. It was Lord Frostenden's name that did it, and everyone invited went. It was a grand blow-out, especially for those who weren't abstainers. Did I say I was present?"

"You inferred as much," Mark smiled.

"Thank you. After the spread we all proceeded to the new parrot-house. There were nearly a hundred birds, and ugly-looking customers some of them were. Lord Frostenden made a short speech without so much as a scream from the parrots; but as soon as the applause had stopped the parrots, with only a few exceptions, began to scream all the obscenities most favoured by the services, not forgetting the bargees' and taxi-drivers' repertories. Old Frostenden was convulsed, but Hosegood, with a horrified expression, stepped up to Mayor Pipe and asked him what he was going to do about this dreadful and degrading exhibition of profanity in a public place. That rather broke up the party."

Mrs. Madderson laughed. "It all seems childish now, but it had everyone laughing for days. But, as Eliot is fond of saying, there's often common sense behind Mr. Hosegood's nonsense. There are notices at the Zoo prohibiting tipping. People proffering tips were immediately ejected. I say 'were' because no one now proffers them. Mr. Hosegood has demonstrated that why tipping continues in a world which is at bottom ashamed of the humiliating practice is simply because people want it to continue. The tippers rather than the tipped. It could be stopped, as he has stopped it, if the will were there."

"Then again, he won't have his animals indiscriminately fed. Those visitors who wish to feed the animals are supplied gratis with the appropriate food by the keepers.

"Then there are his bonfires. Whenever the contents of a

house anywhere within fifty miles are up for sale Mr. Hosegood's agents are there to buy, and the stuff is delivered in vans on to a large field about three miles from the Zoo. There it is erected into an immense bonfire and burnt. Mr. Hosegood sometimes has as many as two or three dozen of these bonfires in a year, and he advertises any especially big one in all the papers of the neighbouring localities. It sounds mad until one has attended a few such sales and seen the dreadful stuff that people go on hoarding year after year."

"It would be a dam' good idea," Madderson said, "if all the furniture in the world were burnt every New Year's Day."

His wife laughed. "Why not all clothes?"

"Absolutely. Why not? Think how good for trade it would be."

"You'll be becoming a disciple of Mr. Clarke."

Madderson chuckled and turned to Mark. "Mervyn Clarke is the editor and proprietor of the local rag, *The Seathorpe Weekly Times*, and his pet theory is that nobody should hold a job for more than a year, as after a year people get stale. So every twelve months there'd be a universal firing."

Mark smiled. "It would keep things lively. People do get in a groove. There's nothing so deadening as routine. He sounds an original."

"He is. He's an Irishman. Ginger-haired and short, with blue eyes and a bark. His wife Kitty's fat and dark and good-natured. He has a regular weekly column in his rag headed *Irish News* and printed in Gaelic. No one barring himself can read it; not even Kitty; but there it is every week, and has been since the Free State was established. He also runs a weekly Literary Page of non-copyright stories and poems, and a serial, all by Irish writers. But it's a bright little rag all the same, and very popular. And so are Mervyn and Kitty. She's got a really luscious contralto, and is always ready to sing for love at any local concert. They've no children, but have a horde of pampered cats."

"Extraordinary how so many childless couples seem to collect cats and pamper them," Mark said; "and spinsters do the same."

"Male and female spinsters," Madderson said; "something to do with sexual incompleteness, probably."

Mark laughed. "The *Courier* news editor used to say all people excessively fond of cats were sexually starved; or perhaps it was inhibited. I always get the jargon wrong. He was a Scot named Ferguson; fat and bawdy. He'd a number of bees in his bonnet, all sexual. He ascribed everything to sex. I can hear him now saying, 'Man, leave sex out of life and what is there left?'"

"I've heard Heldar say that a preoccupation with animals is due to an incomplete sex life. But I think he was saying that to stir up Fellowes. He said that would account for Hosegood."

Mark laughed. "Isn't that pulling it out a bit thin? There's surely a scientific interest in animals."

"But might it not masquerade as a scientific interest? I wouldn't dismiss anything Heldar says, although you can't always be sure he's serious. He has a tremendous library; is a voracious reader; and declares all medical men should return to their schools every five years. He's right up to date. How many G.P.s are? Everybody in Seathorpe swears by him. He had luck, of course. There's always a spot of that in every make-good story. He'd only just started to practise here (it was about twenty years ago) when a wealthy foreign minor royalty whose car had broken down stayed for a night at *The Albany* (that was before *The Royal* was built), and during the night had a violent internal haemorrhage. Heldar successfully operated on him at the Cottage Hospital and then refused the thousand guineas proffered him, saying his fee for the operation was from five to fifty guineas according to the financial position of the patient, and that the fee in the present instance would be fifty guineas. He suggested that H.R.H. should make a donation to the hospital. His Nibs graciously agreed to do this, and a week or so after he had left Seathorpe a cheque from his secretary was received at the hospital. It was for twenty guineas. That affair put Heldar, a young man just married, on the map: and he's remained there ever since. He's M.O.H. for the district, and police surgeon, so his hands are pretty full. Yet he always seems to find time for golf and an hour or so most evenings at *The Club*. But of course the busier a man is the more leisure he seems to manage. It's the lazy, shiftless sort who never have a

minute to spare. Mrs. Heldar is a very gifted woman; she has had many water-colours accepted by the R.A. And Dick and Lesley are brilliant. Naturally. The way to be brilliant is to choose a clever father and a clever mother. Clever parents never have stupid children and stupid parents never have clever ones: never. Dick is something of a mathematical prodigy and is taking the Tripos. Lesley, besides being the prettiest girl in Seathorpe, or in Norfolk for that matter, writes verse and fairy-tales for children and illustrates them herself. She has already had three books published. You and she ought to hit it off well."

"I think we shall," Mark said quietly.

"Do you play tennis? Or golf?"

"Both. I'm only a moderate performer at tennis, but my golf handicap is two."

"Dick and Lesley are often here for tennis," Mrs. Madderson said. "Do come in whenever you like, and don't stand on ceremony."

"And Heldar will thank God for you," Madderson said, with a laugh. "He's the best player here. I think you're going to like Seathorpe."

"I'm already finding it more than tolerable," Mark smiled.

## *Chapter Four*

### CONTACTS

**M**ARK was crossing the Market Place the following morning when the Police Superintendent came up to him and said, "One minute, sir."

Mark stopped. "Yes?" he said.

"Aren't you Mr. Passmore?"

Mark nodded. "My name is Mark Passmore."

"The son of Captain Warren Passmore?"

Mark smiled. "That's right."

"My name is Ferris," the Superintendent went on, "Richard Ferris, and I was in your father's Company. I was the

youngest sergeant in the battalion. I was only twenty. Your father used to say to me, 'Don't forget, Ferris, that Napoleon at twenty was only a corporal, so where you'll end up I don't know.' How is Captain Passmore? I knew he'd been wounded, but I was away in hospital at the time, and when I got back to the battalion we'd had so many casualties that I hardly knew anybody, and no one could give me any details about the Captain."

"He was blinded and crippled by a shell."

"As bad as that, was it? I am sorry to hear that."

"It was as bad as that for five or six years. He was blind and could only get about in an invalid chair. And then a miracle happened; two, in fact; he recovered his sight and later the use of his limbs, and to-day is as well as ever he was." Mark smiled. "In fact, I've an eight-year-old brother."

"That's grand. You know, you're the dead spit of him. A little taller and heavier, perhaps; but when I caught sight of you crossing the Market Place just now I couldn't believe my eyes. You'd be about your father's age when I knew him. You've not been in Seathorpe long?"

"About ten days."

"Queer I've not seen you before. Are you staying long?"

"Probably. I've bought *The White Cottage*."

"It's a nice house. You know about Mr. Crickmay?"

"Yes. Mr. Madderson told me the story."

"Tragic business. I always felt we never got to the bottom of it." He paused, hesitated a moment, and then said, "I wonder if you'd care to have tea with us one afternoon. There's only myself and the wife. I'd like to have a longer talk about Captain Warren. Could tell you a few stories you probably haven't heard."

Mark, who thought Superintendent Ferris might be a very useful man to know, said he would be delighted, and on Ferris suggesting the following afternoon he agreed, and they parted.

Madderson had arranged for Mrs. Paradock to call at *The White Cottage* the next morning. Mark interviewed her in the white-painted, oak-beamed room he had chosen for his study, and was favourably impressed by her. She was a tallish, slender woman in the middle forties, plain-faced, her

black hair cut almost as short as a man's. Madderson had told him her last place had been with the Hubert Goldings (Golding was the Town Clerk), and that she had been dismissed after one of her bouts of drinking. Mark had decided not to mention anything about previous posts or to ask for references, and was surprised when Mrs. Paradock said, "I have brought my references, sir; my last place was with Mr. and Mrs. Golding."

"Er—that's quite all right," Mark said; "Mr. and Mrs. Madderson recommended you, and that is enough."

"There was a difference of opinion, that's why I left," Mrs. Paradock said, regarding him, Mark thought, with more than a touch of defensiveness.

"It does happen," Mark said tritely. "Er—when could you come?"

"I could come at once, sir."

"Do you mean now, this morning?"

"Well, this afternoon, sir: I'd have to arrange with Carter Doy about my things."

"That's splendid."

"About wages, sir."

"O good Lord, yes; I'd forgotten that. What d'you want?"

Mrs. Paradock smiled and was no longer plain-faced. "I'd fifty at my last place," she said.

"Fifty? D'you mean fifty pounds a year?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good Lord! is that all?"

Mrs. Paradock laughed. "If you talk like that, sir, you'll soon be cheated. It's what's usually paid in the district. If it was London, of course, it would be more."

"How much?"

"Sixty, sir. Perhaps sixty-five."

"Well, Mrs. Paradock, I'm a Londoner, so we'll say sixty-five."

Mrs. Paradock seemed moved and slightly embarrassed by this, and flushed. But when Mark said he would want engaged a maid, a kitchen maid, and a pantry boy, and asked her to undertake this for him, she said she'd the very people in mind, and then added, "You'd better leave their wages to me, sir," her tone making it clear that there were not going

to be any more wages in *The White Cottage* so absurdly above the market rate.

Mark asked her how long it would be before he could move in, and was delighted when she said briskly, "I'll have the staff here, sir, this afternoon, so if you moved in in time for dinner that would be quite convenient."

He went along that afternoon to take tea with the Ferrises in their pleasant house on the front, *Rockview*. Mrs. Ferris (whom her husband addressed as Maudie) was a plump comely woman much his junior. Richard Ferris had slightly descended the ladder in his marriage, and his wife's obvious affection had in it more than a touch of awed admiration. Her post was plainly that of listener, and she appeared well content with it. She rarely volunteered an opinion and her comments were mostly limited to nods and smiles. They were childless and kept a dog and a cat, which were so well-behaved that Mark thought, with a mental smile, that their owners must be, according to the Scotsman Ferguson's peculiar measuring-rod, a sexually contented couple.

After tea, while Mrs. Ferris helped the maid with the washing-up, her husband told Mark of various incidents new to him of his father's experiences in the War. "After I was demobilised," Ferris went on, "I joined the Metropolitan Police. I was only twenty-one, was big and strong with a decent education, and it seemed to me as good an opening as I was likely to find. I was at Stepney for some time and then at Wapping, where I was promoted Station Sergeant. I did pretty well, and by the time I was thirty-one I was an inspector: the youngest one in London, I believe." He smiled. "I've a knack of being the youngest man in a job; I believe I'm the youngest Superintendent in Norfolk." He smiled again. "A long way from what Napoleon was at my age. I'd no intention of leaving London, and then I met Maudie. She was just twenty, and it was a case of love at first sight with both of us. But Maudie hated London and longed to live by the sea, having been born there. And as this post was going I applied for it and got it. It was the last thing I'd have dreamt of doing six months earlier: before I met Maudie. *Man proposes and God disposes, they say.* From what I've seen of things I'm inclined to think it should be *Woman dis-*

poses. But I like Seathorpe now and Maudie loves it, and we're very happy here. Quiet, of course. They say nothing ever happens at Seathorpe, and they're about right. But looking back on it now I reckon that a bit too much used to happen in London, and I could spin you some queer yarns."

"I'd like nothing better. You wouldn't mind my using them if I concealed names and so forth? I'm no good at plots."

"Not a bit. Have you given up your work on *The Morning Courier*?"

"Yes. I want to write novels and perhaps a biography or two. Do you do much reading?"

Ferris smiled and got up. "In a way quite a lot; all I've time for. Come up to my little den and I'll show you my books."

Ferris's little den was a very little one. It was at the top of the house, and from its windows one had a good view of the countryside, but the sea was not visible. An armchair, an office chair, and a small desk took up most of what space was not filled with shelves of books.

Ferris pointed to one wall of shelves and said, "They're all books on criminology, studies in crime, verbatim trial reports, and so on; if ever you want to consult them they're at your service." They strolled across to the shelves and Ferris took out a book: *The Life, Times, Crimes, Trials, and Escapes of Jack Sheppard*. "Grand book, this," Ferris said. "That boy was a genius unless the word means something different from what I've always understood."

"I notice you don't include crime fiction," Mark said.

Ferris shook his head. "No good at all. I look on these books as the tools of my trade, not as a hobby; and crime fiction is just fake; cheap-jack tools that won't cut."

"I thought Doyle, Poe, and Gaboriau were supposed to be as good as the real thing."

"Not a bit of it. Anyone can solve a crime he's invented himself. But the real thing, where one has to start from A and laboriously work the way to Z, is a horse of another colour. I understand that when Doyle and Edgar Wallace were consulted about actual crimes they were hopelessly at sea. But I have a hobby. I collect rare books."

"A pretty expensive one."

"Oh, not that sort. Come over here." Presently, when they stood beside a shelf on which were ranged about a dozen volumes, Ferris took one out, opened it, and said, "This is the sort of rare book I mean. It's Wells's *Island of Dr. Moreau*. I first read it during the War. Found it in a dug-out. A Jerry dug-out at that. I was a great reader of Wells. Had read everything he'd written, so I thought; but I'd never read that, and wondered for a moment if it were his latest. But only for a moment, for it was a Nelson's Sevenpenny, and I knew enough about books to know it wasn't a new publication. Later, I discovered it had been written many years earlier, and I was puzzled how I'd missed it. I read it and was fascinated by it. But it wasn't like anything else of Wells's. It stood by itself, not only among his other books but, I thought, among all books. It was in a way unique. That is what I mean by a rare book. And reading it started me off on my hobby: looking for similar rare books. They may be the one rare book of an author with a long list of what I call ordinary books to his credit; or they may be the one rare book of the very few an author produced; but they all have this in common; their authors never before or afterwards did anything like them; nor any other author either."

"You've certainly hit on an interesting hobby," Mark said: "at the moment I can think of only one of that unique sort of book. It's *The End of the World*, by Geoffrey Dennis."

"There it is," smiled Ferris, pointing to a small volume at the end of the row; "it's my latest find; a magnificent book."

Mark nodded. "If all your others are as good you've got a marvellous collection."

"Not all," Ferris said; "one or two are pinchbeck stuff compared with the rest; but most of them, I believe, are not only this rare sort of book, but first rate as literature." He ran his fingers slowly along the backs of the books. "Listen to these: Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*; Beckford's *Vathek*; the Grossmiths' *Diary of a Nobody*; *Last and First Men*, by Olaf Stapledon; Trelawny's *Adventures of a Younger Son*; Canton's *The Invisible Playmate*; Baron Corvo's *Hadrian the Seventh*; Barbellion's *Journal of a Disappointed Man*; Daisy Ashford's *The Young Visitors*; Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; Margaret

Irwin's *Still She Wished for Company*; Helen Beauclerc's *Love of the Foolish Angel*; Donn Byrne's *Messer Marco Polo*; Ollivant's *Owd Bob*; Lamb's *Rosamund Gray*; Paltcock's *Peter Wilkins*; Melville's *Moby Dick*; Williamson's *Tarka the Otter*; and Grahame's *The Golden Age*. That's the tally so far, and I've been nearly twenty years making it. That averages one a year. But I've gone years without finding one. Of course it's a purely personal choice. It entails a lot of reading. But then I do a lot." With a smile: "Police Superintendent at Seathorpe isn't a sinecure, but no one could call it onerous. There's plenty of time for reading. I've always been a great reader and," shooting an almost shy glance at Mark, "it was my ambition as a boy to be an author. I still think it an ideal profession. An author can live wherever his fancy takes him; he needs no tools but pen and ink; he is his own master; and what can be more delightful, more exciting, than to pour out one's thoughts on to paper and then see them transformed into books and sent all over the world so that people may share your thoughts and ideals?"

Mark laughed. "It doesn't work out like that, I'm afraid. In theory, an author can live where he likes; but in practice, if he doesn't live within easy reach of the metropolis he drops out of the social swim, which is bad for his business side; not so much nowadays, perhaps, when an agent can represent him, but generally speaking it is not in an author's best interests (as the publishers and agents phrase it) for him to live a great distance from London; certainly not until he is an established name. As for his tools being simply ink and paper, that is another romantic fairy-tale. An author needs a large reference library, and in the course of writing merely a light novel will consult dozens of reference books. The unfortunate man who embarks on the writing of an historical novel finds himself faced before he can put a word on to paper with the careful reading of twenty or thirty volumes. Much of that reading bears no fruit at all, and frequently the most he will get from labouring through a dull book of a thousand pages will be the material for a short paragraph in his novel. No; authors need a lot of tools and much of their work is dull grind. And where did you get the notion from that an author was his own master? More often than not

he's a slave who jumps to the crack of a whip held by publisher or editor. His own master! Good Lord! do you think he can write what he likes? Nothing could be further from the truth. His writings must not offend the Church, either Anglican or Catholic; they must not offend the State; they must not contain anything that could possibly be considered by the most fantastic prudery or excessive caution obscene, libellous, or blasphemous. If they do offend in any of these ways the author will be asked by his publisher to delete all the offending matter. To the plea that what he has written is true and that its suppression is an offence against the light and a mockery of all that Milton fought for when he wrote *Areopagitica* the rejoinder will be that it is not 'in his best interests to write such things.' He can then either accept this advice and cease to write from his convictions or he can continue to write what he believes to be true: in the latter case his writing life will be one of continual conflict. Every book he writes will become a battleground on which he will fight for its publication. Occasionally he will win a victory and his book will be published as he wrote it; sometimes, after much bickering and vituperation and waste of spirit, he will be forced to compromise and delete and amend; and sometimes his book will not be published at all. During the last five or six years I have met many authors both socially and in the way of business, and anyone who thinks they are dreamy, happy, inspired beings wandering languidly through life with a pen and a writing-pad should frequent their company. Unless they have a private income they are slaves incessantly dredging and battering their brains and for ever struggling to preserve their integrity against the threat of suppression, the bribe of approval. Charles Lamb's advice to Bernard Barton is as valid now as then. If I had not had private means I should have thought not twice but many times before throwing myself upon the resources of my pen. Let me give you a personal instance, quite a trifling one, of how free opinion is suppressed. I wrote one of my feature articles for *The Courier* on the abdication of King Edward VIII. Its flavour was, perhaps, mildly anti-monarchical, since democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy running in triple harness has always seemed to me a ludicrous incongruity. Something

of this feeling was no doubt apparent in the article, and immediately after it appeared Lord Gravenhurst wrote to me saying he disapproved of it, and that if I wished to write that sort of thing we must part company."

Ferris smiled. "You can hardly blame him for that. *The Courier's* a Tory paper. What else could he have done? It's the same with the Constitution; it has to suppress subversive elements. I saw plenty of how that works when I was in London, and as a policeman I did things I wouldn't have done as a private individual. But I went into the Police with my eyes open and I carried out my orders whether they went against the grain or not. And I'd do the same again while I'm taking my pay for the performance of such duties." With another smile: "and I shall certainly now think twice before resigning from the Force to become an author. I'll wait till I retire on pension." Before Mark left Ferris said earnestly, "I hope you won't wait for a formal invitation before calling again; drop in any time you feel like a chat; talking about books is as good as reading them and the next best thing, despite what you say, to writing them. And there's not much chance to talk books in Seathorpe." And then he added with a dry smile: "not for a policeman."

"There's Mr. Prosper Fellowes," Mark said.

Ferris shrugged his shoulders. "There's also Mr. Luther Essenhigh, and the one's as likely to talk books with me as the other."

"Mr. Essenhigh seems something of a mystery."

"He's a recluse, and recluses tend to get that reputation. Officially we know nothing about him. He's no doubt something of a character, but nothing so rich a one as Mr. Mortimer Hosegood. A novel could be written round a man like that."

"Or like Sir Jack Borlase."

Ferris nodded. "The sort of novel Arthur Morrison used to write."

The following morning, Tom Palmer being at work in the garden, Mark had a Guinness sent out to him and later strolled out to chat with him about the garden. Palmer had not quite finished his drink and was knocking out his pipe. Mark offered him a fill from his pouch. "Tisn't very often a

Guinness comes my way," Palmer said; "a cup of tea's the usual limit. Tea's all right and I've drunk plenty in my time, but it hasn't got what you'd call body in it. But some men can drink it all day and half the night. My first skipper was like that. I went to sea when I was ten. Don't ask me why. British merchant seaman. What a job! Scum of the earth." He caught Mark's sudden glance and gave a faint grin. "That's right. Ask any British merchant seaman and he'll tell you that's right. They must be. For that's how they're treated. And if the owners and skippers don't know, who does? Dog's life? Don't you believe it. Treat a dog like it and you'd get six months in jail. Ask a dog to sleep in the fo'c'sle of a British merchant ship and he'd bite you; offer him the food that's good enough for British merchant seamen and he'd run a mile. It's a grand life. Bugs and rats and no rights. Rights! Ask a skipper for your rights and see what you get. Ever heard a beak dressing down a seaman who's trying to get justice from a skipper? Justice! For a merchant seaman! What are you thinking of, my man? Take six months. Why do we join the merchant service? Ask me another. Love of the sea? Speaking for myself, I hate the sight of it. Why do men do all sorts of dam' silly things? But I'd still be signing on again from one rotten voyage to another more rotten if I hadn't got this game leg handed out to me. Washed into the scuppers and my leg broken in two places. Skipper set it. Result: inch and a half short. Out you go, my lad. Compensation? What're you talking about? Haven't we provided you with a nice healthy occupation for years, to say nothing of showing you the sights of the world? Compensation? Beat it."

Mark, amused, made no attempt to stop the flow, thinking it all grist for a novelist's mill.

"If I hadn't known more'n a bit about gardening," went on Palmer, "I could have sold matches in the gutter. My father was a gardener, and so was his father, and if I'd had any sense that's what I'd have done from the first. But O no! the adventurous life for me. So off I ran to sea to see life. Well, I saw it. And what wasn't ugly was dirty, and what wasn't dirty stunk. And plenty of work thrown in."

"Well, Seathorpe is not a bad place to come to harbour in," Mark said.

"It's not a patch on the place I was born in. Southwold in Suffolk. That's where I ought to have gone back to when I left the sea. But I didn't. Don't ask me why. I don't know. That's a place for you. Everybody friendly. But I don't like Norfolk people, and that's flat. Unfriendly lot. And suspicious. You'd never believe it. I won't name no names, but not five hundred miles from here I've been accused of pinching a lawnmower and exchanging it for a garden roller. Does it make sense? Who'd swop a ruddy lawnmower for a roller? But that's Seathorpe all over from the highest to the lowest. And not even a straight accusation as man to man. But slipping it in when you're thinking of something else: Did you *lend* the lawnmower to Mr. Dauncey, Palmer? You'd think a lawnmower was a precious heirloom. You've got some nice lawns here. What they really want is one of them motor-mowers, and if you think of going in for one I know a man who's willing to sell his cheap for a quick sale. Nobody could say Seathorpe's a bright place. And as for excitement, I've lived here nearly six years and if anything's happened I've never heard about it, and I'm not exactly deaf. It's all right if you're looking for a bit of peace and quiet or want to lay doggo for a bit. But I like a bit o' life. And so does Mrs. Palmer. She's gone grey since we've been here, and she's not yet forty. Bored grey. Well, I'd better get a move on. If you think of going in for one of those motor-mowers leave it to me. I can save you pounds."

A few mornings later (it was a Sunday) Mark was pottering about in the garden, pipe in mouth, when Mrs. Paradock came towards him. She had been cutting flowers for the table; and with the memory of the excellently cooked breakfast he had so enjoyed and was now peacefully digesting he gave her a smile and said what a fine morning it was.

This was apparently the cue Mrs. Paradock had hoped for, as she stopped and said quickly, "Yes, sir, it is a nice morning; the thunder yesterday cleared the air."

"I thought we were in for a storm," Mark said.

"Yes, sir, and didn't I know it! When there's thunder about like that it plays me up terrible; I just feel like nothing;

limp as a wet rag and nervous as a cat. Daresay you noticed I wasn't myself last night, sir."

"Well, now you mention it, Mrs. Paradock, I do remember that I thought you seemed a little agitated. I believe the electricity in the air does affect some people in that way. You're not looking too well now. You must take it easy this morning."

"Oh, I'm all right now, sir, thank you; but I just thought as how I'd mention how thunder about upsets me in case you noticed anything."

Mark smiled and nodded. "I'll keep it in mind, Mrs. Paradock." He was amused by her artlessness. Yesterday evening the taint of gin had been strong in her breath, and this morning she was obviously suffering from a hangover. Guessing he had noticed her condition, she had snatched at the weather as the cause. Mark did not feel disposed to go any further into the matter. It had not affected her efficiency; what business, then, was it of his?

He dawdled in the garden for another hour and then brought out his unfinished novel *Rain Before Seven* and re-read the first five chapters. He found them flat and unconvincing and was depressed until he turned to chapters nine and ten, which he believed good, and reading them through was thrilled by them and his good spirits completely restored. But the novel wouldn't do. Five dull opening chapters would sink any book, however good the rest: he would have to rewrite them; scrap them completely and do them over again. Blast them! How he hated rewriting! Shakespeare never blotted a line: why the devil should *he* have to?

If he had had any doubts about Mrs. Paradock's hangover lessening her efficiency they would have been dispelled by the excellent meal served to him just after one. As he ate it with great enjoyment the thought came to him that apart from the immediate labours of the three women of his household many other human beings had laboured so that he might have this meal to enjoy: all that labour and care for the pleasure of one human being, and so transient a pleasure: as far as he was concerned the result of all those combined care and efforts was consumed in half an hour. Had there been guests sitting with him he felt there would have been

method of producing music mechanically, creating it artificially as it were, and that he has come down to Seathorpe (which was no doubt recommended to him as the sleepiest place on earth) to perfect his invention, realising that Seathorpe would never summon up sufficient energy to be interested, far less inquisitive."

"What's he like to look at?" Mark asked.

Dick shrugged. "He's been here about six years and I've never seen him. Of course, I'm mostly away from home."

Alison, Lesley, and Mr. Madderson had all seen him, and they agreed that he was a tall, dark, scholarly-looking middle-aged man; but whereas Lesley said he was handsome, Alison said she would have described his appearance as slightly sinister; while her father thought forbidding the better word.

The subject then dropped, and Dick said to Mark: "We didn't see you at church this morning."

"Why, did you look for me?" Mark smiled.

"We couldn't miss you. I mean your absence. All newcomers are objects of intense religious interest to Seathorpians, and your absence, you may depend upon it, was duly noted."

Mark failed to take him seriously. "Does anyone go to church these days?" he asked, at which Madderson broke in with a laugh, "Everyone in Seathorpe. Always have done and always will do, no matter what happens to religion and the Church. It's a traditional habit; the thing to do; and it has never occurred to anyone to break from that tradition. I'm prepared to bet you a fiver the vicar will call on you to-morrow to learn why you absented yourself——"

"And," interrupted Dick, with a laugh, "he'll say, 'Er—are you—er—a Roman Catholic?' and the way he'll enunciate 'Roman' will be positively scatological. Oh, I say! I hope I'm not being dam' clumsy."

Mark laughed. "Not a bit. I doubt if I've any real religious beliefs; certainly none I'd die for or quarrel about; but if I have to have a label I suppose it is Anglican."

"Then the sooner you make your peace with the Rev. Xavier and attend St. John's the better."

"Is he invariably so assiduous a shepherd in rounding up the sheep?" Mark smiled.

"Well, let's be charitable," Dick said. "There's a Church

Restoration Fund which still needs about eight thousand: we'll leave it at that."

Mark refused to stay to tea, saying he'd a lot of work to do before dinner, but he accepted Mr. Madderson's invitation to come along to *The Club* that evening. "I'll give you a hail about nine or so," Madderson said. "By this time next week you should be a pukka member. Sir Jack Borlase too. There's only the formality now of asking him if he wishes his name to go forward for election."

As Mark strolled back to *The White Cottage* his spirits were depressed. He was conscious of having made no contact at all with Lesley, and he felt gloomily that she was not in the least attracted to him.

At *The Club* that evening he was introduced to Mr. Arthur Creed, the Mayor; to Mr. Prosper Fellowes, the nature writer; to Dr. Heldar; and to Mr. Hubert Golding, the Town Clerk. Other notables were pointed out to him.

Mr. Fellowes was a plump, smallish, sandy man, his stiff hair like a brush, his eyes globular behind horn-rimmed spectacles. Madderson introduced Mark to him as 'a brother writer; Mark Passinore of *The Morning Courier*.' "Charmed," Mr. Fellowes said, "charmed"; and then added, to Mark's amusement, "afraid I read *The Times*."

Mr. Fellowes was soon launched upon what was apparently his King Charles's head. There had been very large attendances at the London Zoo, and the Sunday papers all carried photographs of the holiday-making crowds. "Zoos," Mr. Fellowes said, "are one of the iniquities of civilisation. If 'a wild bird in a cage puts all Heaven in a rage', as the poet tells us, what is to be said of a tiger in a cage? of a lion? of an eagle? An eagle in a cage! What sort of man is it, what sort of mind is it, that could conceive and carry out a crime like that?" He looked round upon the half-dozen or so men sitting near him. "We know the answer to that question, for we have a neighbour who dabbles in that particularly foul manifestation of sadism. Look at Mr. Mortimer Hosegood; note the cold blue eye; the tigerish smile; the great teeth; the barking voice. Where have you noted the like before? At any circus where trained animals perform: the trainer. Precisely. The lion-tamer of tradition. The animal torturer. Had Mr. Hosegood

been a poor man he would have become a circus animal trainer or lion-tamer; but being a millionaire he can indulge his filthy vice on the largest scale. The Romans gave their people bread, circuses, baths, and brothels; we give ours zoos, football matches, gin, and contraceptives. Is this progress or retrogression? Is this——” At this point a steward glided (all the stewards of *The Club* glided, the thick pile of the carpets facilitating this) up to Mr. Fellowes and informed him that his table was waiting in the billiards room.

As Fellowes disappeared Madderson caught Mark's eye and smiled. “Just a little personal quarrel,” he said. “Fellowes in one of his books used the phrase ‘the harsh cry of the ostrich,’ and Hosegood wrote a letter to *The Seathorpe Weekly Times* saying that ostriches roared, and that a nature writer who didn't know that was a fake. Few editors would have printed so grossly insulting a letter, but Mervyn Clarke had once asked Fellowes to contribute an occasional nature article, had been snubbed, and was delighted to have the chance of humiliating Fellowes. The whole thing was a nasty piece of pettiness; the sort of thing you get in small communities. Fellowes, for all his arrogance, is a first-rate naturalist with a reputation that goes outside this country, and the thing was so obviously a slip of the pen.”

“I haven't much sympathy with Fellowes,” Dr. Heldar said. “I abominate arrogance, whether it's the arrogance of birth or great place or of the intellect. And, on the lowest scale, it just doesn't pay. It's unsafe in this world to kick anyone. The kicked of to-day may be the world-conqueror of to-morrow.”

“Is that Father Lampard?” Mark asked.

Dr. Heldar turned his head. “Yes. Straight out of *Tomorrow will be Friday*. He and the vicar and curate of St. John's are all members, but Father Lampard is the only one of the three to come in on Sundays. That sort of common sense is one of the strongest weapons in the Catholic armoury. And how do you think you'll like *The Club*, Mr. Passmore?”

“Quite a lot, I expect.”

“There's only one better. Do you play—but how forgetful of me! I understand from Madderson you're a two handicap man?” At Mark's nod and smile he went on, “then there's no question about your joining us; you must; I shall get a game

at last. It's rather boring playing with the professional in order to get extended. Bunbury's a good chap, but his conversation is limited. Monday afternoon's usually slack with me; would you care for a round to-morrow?"

Mark said he would be delighted, and knowing that Dick and Lesley were both members, he secretly hoped it might be a foursome.

"When I get a slack afternoon," Madderson said, "I snooze."

"All your afternoons are slack," Heldar said; "and you're always snoozing; a disgusting habit for a comparatively young man."

"Cause and effect," Madderson said; "I look young; a well-preserved forty-five; everyone admits it. And I'm fifty. That's four years older than you, Frank. And do you look a well-preserved forty-five? You don't. You look fifty. Your thatch is iron-grey and I haven't a grey hair. Cause and effect."

"And your paunch, my dear Eliot, is positively Falstaffian; whereas I go thirty-three. Cause and effect."

"Did you ever know a fat man who wasn't in the pink or a skinny one who wasn't at death's door?"

"All fat people are at death's door."

"But smiling. Frank; happy and smiling; you will admit that."

And so it went on; an old argument between them, and so obviously staged for Mark's benefit that he pretended to be highly amused. After all, had not Madderson been extremely kind and hospitable, and was not Dr. Heldar Lesley's father?

The next morning Mark was in his study hammering away at the recalcitrant early chapters of *Rain Before Seven*, when the Rev. Xavier Cunningham called and was shown in.

The vicar apologised if he were interrupting work, said he would call later, feigned to withdraw, but needed very little persuasion to remain. "I was not aware you were an author, Mr. Passmore," he said. Mark began to wonder if anyone in Seathorpe had ever heard of him or of *The Courier*.

For a few moments they discussed the exacting work of authorship, and then the vicar said, "I did not notice you in the congregation at St. John's yesterday, Mr. Passmore."

"I was not there," Mark replied, and waited.

"You are not by any chance a Roman Catholic?" and the adjective was enunciated, mouthed rather, as Dick Heldar had described it.

"O no."

"I am glad to hear that. Now may we hope that—er—next Sunday . . .?"

It amused Mark that the Rev. Xavier so clearly ruled out any other alternative to Catholicism but Anglicanism. Plainly the vicar's whole attitude said: a gentleman is either, most appallingly, a Roman Catholic; or he is a member of the Church of England. In the vicar's penfold there was room for none other flocks but these.

"I hope to be present at matins," Mark said.

"That is very gratifying. St. John's is one of the most beautiful churches in England. Its fretted roof and altar-screen are unsurpassed in Europe. Even without the presence of God one could not but feel there a sense of worship, of awe. But I will not expatiate lest I spoil this beautiful and sacred feast for you. We are a church-going folk in Seathorpe. I don't mean that we are necessarily more devout than our fellows, but we do regularly attend God's house. I wish I could say the same for the people at large. One of the most distressing and dangerous features of modern society is the decay of church-going. It began, I am sorry to say, at the top and the commonalty followed. It had already begun before the War, and the War, which might have stayed it and, indeed, turned it into a religious revival, merely accelerated it. I have often asked myself why. I have an uncomfortable feeling that the Church failed the people in the War. There were too many bellicose bishops and they were too vocal. The people know that war is an evil thing; that it is cruel and murderous and wasteful. I feel the Church lost its opportunity. It sat on the fence and, if I may mix my metaphors, it tried to run with the hare and the hounds. The people would have responded to a forthright declaration, whether for or against war, as they always do; but this double-faced attitude of the Church merely antagonised all the best elements among the people and drove them away from the Church. It was not that the people did not want spiritual comfort and help; they wanted this so badly that when the Church failed them they were driven

into the arms of the quacks: spiritualism, astrology, and similar counterfeits flourished amazingly. To-day, to judge by the empty churches, the country seems infidel. But it is only seeming. Everywhere people are ripe for a great spiritual revival, and that it will come is certain. That it also will come, must come, from the top is equally certain. I will not trespass any further on your time, Mr. Passmore. This little talk has been quite delightful."

Playing a round with Dr. Heldar that afternoon. Mark told him of the vicar's call on him and repeated some of the things he had said. Dr. Heldar shrugged. "As a parson I suppose he's afraid to grasp the nettle and face the facts. All the Churches failed in the War, as they have always done. An honest Christian Church has no other course open to it but to denounce war, all war, whether offensive or defensive: that is the logic of its teaching. As they failed to do this they have cut their own throats; but I admit it will take them a long time to bleed to death."

Mark, having won the game by 3 and 2, accepted an invitation to dine with the Heldars that evening, and found himself quite the hero of the occasion with Dick and Lesley, as the victor over their father, whom they had never beaten and freely admitted they were never likely to.

After dinner they listened to a short radio recital by Kreisler on records, and this again brought up the subject of Luther Essenhight and the strange music often heard coming from *Bevis House*. "After listening to Mr. Essenhight's compositions," Lesley said, "anything else seems insipid, bloodless."

Dick nodded. "If they are Essenhight's compositions. And if they're not, who the devil's are they? Is there such another small sleepy place in the world as Seathorpe that can show three such odd fish as Essenhight, Fellowes, and Mortimer Hosegood?"

"With Mr. Mervyn Clarke as runner-up!" Lesley laughed.

Dick nodded and, turning to Mark, said: "And did the vicar call this morning?"

"Yes. And proceeded according to schedule. He also gave me a disquisition on the Church's shortcomings before, during, and after the War."

"Had the Church taken a firm line and denounced war, all

war," Dr. Heldar said, "it might conceivably have brought about the greatest religious revival in history. The country was ripe for it; all the warring countries were. But the opportunity was let slip and may never come again."

"You're behind the times, Father," Dick smiled; "it's already here; haven't you heard of the Oxford Group? Both universities are now simply seething with devotion, swarming with pious young men."

"And women?" asked Lesley.

"No. The women are holding aloof. But they'll probably come in. It may capture the whole country. I imagine revivals come in fairly regular cycles. It would make an interesting study. If I were reading for a doctorate in theology I'd make it my thesis. But I doubt if the records go far enough back to enable one to do anything really worth while."

"It would be a rather dangerous thesis to present," his father said; "for what are its implications? That the hold of religion on humanity is a spasmodic business."

"Not at all, Father," Dick smiled; "that's the wrong presentation. What it would prove would be that humanity cannot get on for long with a purely materialistic philosophy of life. Even when it has thrown out the spiritual it hungers for it, longs to welcome it back, and ultimately does so in a religious revival."

Smoking a last pipe in bed that night, Mark reviewed the day and found it a full one. A sense of satisfaction pervaded him. He felt, for no reason at all, that he had established some sort of mental contact with Lesley.

### *Chapter Five*

#### OF SIR JACK BORLASE AND OTHERS

THE following Sunday Mark attended matins at St. John's. As he felt all about him the impalpable press of the great congregation he realised how factual had been Madderson's statement that everybody went to church. He thought to himself that if the Oratory and the Baptist and

Congregational chapels were as full, then all Seathorpe must be worshipping God except Tom Palmer, his wife Daisy, and the women cooking the Sunday dinners. He did not know that no one in Seathorpe had a hot dinner on Sunday, and that the regimen was hot sirloin or silverside (according to social scale) on Saturday and then what was called 'a cold collation' on Sunday. Except for a few invalids, except for Mr. Luther Essenhig, and except for the Palmers, all Seathorpe was at worship; but who was worshipping Jehovah and who some more personal gods no one is called upon to investigate.

Mark was not a complete stranger to the interior beauty of St. John's, but this was the first time he had been at a service, and the concourse of people seemed to add an awe-inspiring touch, lacking before, to the imposing magnificence, the arresting beauty, of the architecture. He noticed with that mild amusement such incongruities always aroused in him the private pews with their coats of arms, the names of their owners, and the occupants themselves, from that cynical old aristocrat Lord Frostenden to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Creed, a little self-conscious and rather too stiffly Sundayfied for bodily ease, in the mayoral pew. He had noticed with some astonishment on entering the church a figure in sixteenth-century costume carrying a tall rod and standing at the foot of the stairs leading to the organ loft. This was the parish beadle, and Seathorpe was proud of him, the last correctly accoutred specimen, it claimed, in the kingdom. Mark puzzled over a certain familiarity in the features and bearing of this dignified monitory figure, and at last recognised him as Bill Watson, fisherman and Seathorpe character of local fame through his eating and drinking exploits at the annual Sprat Suppers in November, and likely, it now appeared, to become even more notable as the father of pretty Amy Watson, to whom the Larrikin Baronet was, according to rumour, already paying his attentions.

Mark had heard this rumour from Madderson, and, the beadle having reminded him of it, he turned in his seat and allowed his glance to stray discreetly and decorously over the congregation in search of Amy. He was not long in finding her, well back among the plain pews where the commonalty

were permitted to worship God for no more than the sum given at collection; and since, by an odd oversight on the vicar's part, the collection was taken in long red velvet bags (of great age) that sum need not exceed the widow's mite. Having found Amy, Mark could not but think she was well worth finding. She was not fashionably dressed, a redundant statement. She had not even tried to imitate the fashions her betters could afford. She wore a blue Dolly Varden hat and a blue cotton dress; her hair was golden, her eyes blue, her lips red; and she was seventeen. Inevitably his glance went from her to the great Borlase family pew, in size almost a Lady chapel, its coat of arms in faded red, blue, and gold on door and panels, and the worn carvings of the seven deadly sins on the newels of its rail. But Sir Jack was not there. Was he, Mark wondered, a Catholic? It was plain that not many of Seathorpe's notables were of the old faith, for the pews of the somebodies occupied half the seating space. His thoughts were interrupted by the sharp clanging note of a bell. A small armoured figure in a niche above the vestry had struck a bell with its axe, and a moment later the choir paced slowly out, followed by the Rev. Cyril Staines, who gave the impression that he was starring in a film called *The Soul of a Curate*; and by the Rev. Xavier Cunningham, whose bearing was not unworthy of the Primacy.

During the service the Rev. Cyril read the lessons in a voice of such virile and muscular Christianity that small waves of mental nausea lapped at Mark's mind and no doubt at the minds of most of the other men present. The vicar's sermon was an eloquent one; not, it must be admitted, to the glory of God (except, perhaps, indirectly), but in the cause of the Church Restoration Fund, which still lacked by several thousand pounds the necessary sum without which the vicar did not feel justified in starting ('dare not,' he proclaimed with quite moving passion) the work. Much of the vicar's sermon was given over to the mystic relationship between God and man, but with his peroration he came down to earth and announced forthrightly that a Church Bazaar would be held on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of the coming week in the Town Hall, generously lent by his worship the Mayor and the Council (a glance like the laying-on of hands was

here bestowed upon Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Creed), and gifts would be received there on each of the three mornings by either the vicar himself, or Mrs. Cunningham, or the Rev. Cyril, or Miss Sybil Cunningham. The vicar hoped, he said, to raise by the bazaar one hundred pounds; in wilder moments, he added with a grave smile, I have hopes of two hundred. He exhorted everyone to contribute; nothing was too small; nothing too large. And if, he ended on a note of scholarly jocosity, you cannot find it in your heart to part with any of your lares and penates, I shall not refuse cheques, pound and ten-shilling notes, or even silver coins of English currency. Seathorpe liked a touch of Latin from the pulpit; but not more than a touch; they didn't want any Popery; just an allusion; it made them feel good; added to their self-esteem, their self-importance. And opened their purses.

That evening Mark went to the Oratory. The richer Catholic ritual had always appealed to him aesthetically, and when he lived in London he frequently went to Farm Street Church, where the lovely singing of the choir-boys had added to the moving sensuousness of the service. Father Lampard's sermon was simple, its language almost colloquial in comparison with the vicar's ponderous tropes. The priest, like the vicar, was not above a touch of jocosity, and by the smiles which greeted his 'our beautiful Church of St. John temporarily in the possession of the Anglican heresy' Mark guessed that this was a familiar and popular jape of his.

After the service he strolled along the front in the gathering dusk, smoking his pipe and watching the sea and the pricking out of the stars which appear with such suddenness that each night might be their moment of creation. He felt extraordinarily happy. A sense of physical well-being pervaded him; but it was more than that; deeper, more intense. It was a pity, he thought, that one had to fall back upon so vague and so overworked a word as 'spiritual' to convey that sense of profound inner harmoniousness, contentment, with which all people are acquainted, rare as its visitations may be. He smoked his pipe out, was tempted to sit down and smoke another while the warm soft darkness crept in from the sea, but resisted the temptation in favour of returning home to wrestle with the accursed novel. It was at this moment that

Madderson came padding along (Alison's phrase), and his invitation to join them at supper enabled Mark to congratulate himself upon a virtuous decision and to avoid its onerous consequences.

After supper they sat in the garden and listened to the radio. It was the last day of Sam's leave. He and Alison were sitting close together, and Mark felt the darkness heavy with their parting. Presently someone switched off the radio and for a while there was a silence, which lasted so long that it was a relief when Madderson said abruptly: "So you went to the Oratory this evening."

"Well, I did," Mark said, his face lighting up redly as he drew at his pipe; "but how did you know?"

"How?" Madderson laughed. "Why, everybody in Seathorpe knows by now. You've fired off a rocket, my boy."

"Who was it," Alison smiled, "who said 'We have this day lit a candle which will never go out'?"

"The Wright brothers probably," Sam said; "it's a candle that may put our lights out, all of us."

"Sam," Alison said, "you're getting to be a man of one idea."

"Two, darling."

"I've just been thinking," Alison said, "that while there are plenty of converts to Rome one never hears of a convert to Anglicanism. One is born into it, stays in it, or abandons it, but is never converted to it. Isn't that queer? I wonder why it is."

"But is it true?" her father said; "what do you say, Mr. Passmore?"

"It sounds true; almost a truism. Isn't it also said that anyone who leaves the Church of Rome always becomes, or already is, an atheist? In other words, there is for Catholics either the affirmation of Holy Church or negation."

"I suspect all generalities," Madderson said. "I'd cut 'all' out of the vocabulary. Even 'all men are mortal' is not true, if we accept holy writ."

"What about 'all men are liars'?" Sam said. "Has there ever been a human being who never told a lie?"

Madderson laughed. "I suppose even the dumb tell lies on their fingers, but I should think it's a bit cramping. Do

animals lie? Or is *Homo sapiens* the only species with the gift? Which reminds me: one of Hosegood's jaguars escaped on Friday night, and early yesterday morning killed one of Mr. Prout's horses, and was then frightened out of its wits and chivvied up into a tree by Prout's fox terrier; and there it stayed snarling and bristling with terror until a mobile cage came for it from the Zoo."

"How unlucky for Mr. Prout!" Mrs. Madderson said. "But I suppose he will get compensation."

"Unlucky! He's laughing. The horse was a sorry old jade, lame and tubed and dear at a tenner. He valued it at a hundred, and Hosegood paid up like a lamb. Dauncey told me this morning."

"Millionaires are not usually so soft," Sam said; "or they'd not be millionaires."

"It was Hosegood's tender spot," Madderson said; "it's his boast that his animals never escape; never want to escape, because they're so well treated. Prout's demand of a hundred was really blackmail, for when paying it Hosegood stipulated that Prout should keep his mouth shut." He chuckled. "Pity Fellowes is on such bad terms with Mervyn Clarke and Clarke so thick with Hosegood. Think what P.F. could have made of this if the columns of *The Seathorpe Weekly Times* had been open to him!"

"Mr. Prout doesn't seem to have honoured his bargain," Alison said.

"Oh, Dauncey had been called in to attend to the horse. Dauncey won't talk. He and Hosegood are very friendly."

"He seems to have done a certain amount already," Alison said dryly.

"O, he knows I'm all right."

"And you know we're all right!" Alison laughed.

"And so pop goes the weasel!" Sam said. "Come along, Al; let's go for a walk."

The two having gone, Madderson said to Mark: "You had the secretary's note acquainting you with your election to *The Club*?"

"Yes. And on Friday I was elected a member of the Golf Club. You do things quickly here."

At this Madderson and his wife laughed, and Madderson

said: "My dear fellow, there's not a slower place in the country. The harbour's been silted up for over thirty years; the Council are always going to do something about it, but never do, although the fishing here was once a thriving industry and could be again with harbour facilities. For nearly as many years there were longwinded and silly arguments over main drainage, and it was only put in three years ago. Imagine it. The station is five miles away, and there is still no 'bus service. We've one small cinema, and until two years ago hadn't even that; the magic lantern, having been good enough for Queen Victoria, was good enough for us. The only house with electricity is *Bevis Hall*, and that is because Luther Essenhigh runs his own plant. Not more than ten per cent. of the houses have baths, and during the summer our Mrs. Grundy won't permit men to bathe in trunks or women to wear the backless suits."

Mark laughed at this last item. "But how can the Council prevent people wearing what they like provided it's not indecent? Surely visitors won't submit to such pettifogging interference."

"They do. No bathing is allowed except from the Council's tents and huts, and if your swim suit doesn't conform you're refused accommodation. No, my boy, Norfolk is the slowest county in England, and Seathorpe is the slowest town in Norfolk. Oh, by the by, *The Club* decided to swallow the Larrikin Baronet, and the secretary wrote to him to ask if he would like his name to go forward for membership at the next Committee meeting. He replied No." Madderson chuckled. "The Committee was considerably affronted, not to say furious, especially the vicar, who is this year's Chairman; he was hoping to nail him for something handsome for the Restoration Fund."

"Why do you think he declined the invitation?" Mark asked.

"Feels he's been snubbed; or is being asked because of his title and money; or just doesn't want to."

"Being more interested at the moment in courting," Mrs. Madderson said.

"It's true, then, about the fisher maid?"

Madderson laughed. "Amy Watson's no fish girl. She'd be

horrified. She's in the desk at Rust's. But it's true about Sir Jack. He's making the running like wildfire."

"Is there a field?" Mark smiled.

"Quite a large one. Good Lord! isn't she pretty enough for a Derby? But Sir Jack from all accounts is already in the home straight with the others stringing out hopelessly all over the course. But what a leg up for little Amy! Lady Borlase. Wonder how she'll rise to it. What do you think, Bee?"

"She'll be all right," Mrs. Madderson said; "especially if she mixes freely with people in her new condition. Women can and do adapt themselves perfectly to sudden social elevation. Men don't and can't. I think it is because women are more imitative. A woman who is young and intelligent will, in less than a year in a higher station of life, have acquired enough to be indistinguishable from the other women of her new circle. And Amy Watson is young and intelligent, and pretty into the bargain. Sir Jack will be something of a drag on her, for he'll never be anything different from what he is: an Australian larrikin. But given twelve months in the right environment and Amy would grace a throne. So would any pretty young woman of gumption."

"I think you're right, Bee." Madderson said; "but it's not so easy for a man, you know. He'd have insurmountable handicaps. He'd have no school. No one asks a woman what school she went to. No one cares. But it's tops with a man. He'd also have no university, although that's no great odds perhaps. Then he couldn't talk hunting, fishing, shooting, cricket, polo, rugger: not as it is talked. Call it a veneer if you like, but it's one few men could acquire in a lifetime. You're born into it or you're out of it. There are a few men who could manage it, but they're the sort who're eighty per cent. feminine; the actor type; the average normal man is far too self-conscious to act a part. If Sir Jack and Amy Watson marry and go into society, in twelve months Amy will be, as you say, Lady Borlase, indistinguishable from any former Lady Borlase; while Sir Jack will still be the Larrikin Baronet. And till he dies."

"I noticed he wasn't at church this morning," Mark said.

Madderson laughed. "He was, but you couldn't have

noticed him, for he attends St. Edmund's at Renham, five miles away. Has done morning and evening every Sunday since he's been here. Drives himself there in a brand new M.G. Why? Probably a dozen reasons. Chiefly, I daresay, the same which were at the back of his blunt No to *The Club*. But if you're particularly eager to see him he's usually in *The Goat in Boots* most evenings between nine and ten. After the *Ship*, the *Goat*'s the best pub in Seathorpe. But it's almost exclusively working class. Just as the *Ship*'s anything but. I don't mean there isn't occasionally a certain amount of—er—infiltration, especially in the summer, when a visitor will take a fisherman into the *Ship* or go into the *Goat* himself. But as a general rule each keeps to itself. I've been in the *Goat*, but the atmosphere was a bit strained, I thought." He chuckled. "As far as Ben Murray's concerned (he's the owner) I'm *persona grata*, and with drinks on the house thrown in. Two or three years ago his sign was so faded and shabby that his regulars took to chi-iking him about it, calling it *The Ghost in Boots* and other more ribald names; and so Ben decided to do something about it. He stopped me in the Market Place, and after a bit of clearing his throat and fumbling with his watch-chain asked me to do it. Said he knew I was a famous artist and my price would be stiff, but times were good, and so he thought he might as well have something the town would be proud of. Pretty handsome that, I thought. 'All right, Ben,' I said; 'I'll do it.' He thanked me several times and then he said, 'And don't spare anything, Mr. Madderson; best paint and all the rest, and I don't mind going as far as three quid for the job.' When I'd finished it wasn't easy to persuade him to take it as a gift. But I told him the trade union rate for inn signs was a shilling for fifty square inches, and at this rate the sign worked out at thirty shillings; but I was sure he'd be ashamed to pay so little, and I daren't take more, so I'd be very glad if he'd have it as a gift. After some hesitation he agreed, but said, 'Only if you let me pay for the paint, Mr. Madderson.' I told him that cost four bob, and he handed over two florins, remarking that he was glad I'd used the best paint. And everyone was happy. Seathorpe to the life."

"Men and their pubs and their clubs!" Mrs. Madderson said; "you're only overgrown boys."

"Women are unclubbable," Madderson said; "and so you're all envious. Pubs are a necessity."

"Sam seems to do pretty well without them."

"Sam's an abstainer," Madderson said, turning to Mark; "a teetotal fanatic; doesn't smoke either; says you've got to be fit in his job and you can't be if you drink or smoke. Another one of his bees."

"I thought he'd only one!" Mark laughed.

"One hive; lots of bees. He says the human race took a wrong turning when it discovered fermented liquors. Says drink is the root of all that's inexplicable, daft, cruel, ugly, and mean in human nature; and that the reason the French are so unstable and unreliable is because they're all under the influence of alcohol by two p.m. every day. He wants to see the world go dry."

"But he gives it only another twenty years or so of existence," Mark said; "why bother to reform it at the eleventh hour?"

"Oh, Sam's nothing if not inconsistent. Keeps his bees in separate compartments. I pointed out to him that the United States had tried going dry and had made a howling mess of it. He brushed that aside, saying it had failed because liquor *could* be got. He says the world would need to be kept compulsorily dry for one generation and the thing would be done, and then everybody would be a hundred per cent. fit and away would go sickness and crime, or most of it."

"There's something in what he says," Mrs. Madderson said.

"There's always something in what he says; but there's not much in this. He's looking at it from the wrong angle. He forgets that wine, or liquor, to use his own word, gives its own especial pleasure, a pleasure unobtainable in any other way; just as tobacco does and love-making; there's no substitute. So if you abolish liquor you destroy one of the very real pleasures of life, and are they so many that we can contemplate the loss of one with equanimity? I should say it's a safe bet humanity will never give up fermented liquors any more than they will give up tobacco, or making love to women quite apart from procreation. In the matter of drinking I imagine humanity will set itself in the future to the making of liquors which will

give more and more pleasure, finer, subtler pleasure, with less and less after-effects, until the hangover has been banished from the earth with all those other pests whose passing is overdue: the epidemic diseases. Sam's a first-class mechanic and flying man, but he's no prophet. They're being married in the early spring. I wish he'd been anything but in the R.A.F. It doesn't commend itself to us as a job for a husband and prospective father. I once sounded Sam about resigning his commission and taking a safer job, but he told me his heart is in flying, and if he left the R.A.F. he'd become a civil pilot. He also said that if he left and war broke out, and he says it's coming as sure as to-morrow (another of his bees), he'd be back in it. His final argument was that Alison was as keen on flying as he was. In fact, they propose to spend their honeymoon in their own 'plane (it's a Puss Moth) touring Europe, and Alison will learn how to fly it. So that's that. Well, he's a fine boy."

"And Alison's a fine girl," Mrs. Madderson said.

"Naturally." Madderson chuckled. "So is Lesley. What do you think of Lesley, Mr. Passmore?"

"Isn't that the gate?" Mark said: "that'll be Sam and Alison. And it's after eleven. It's positively indecent the way I hang on."

The following morning Mark was walking in his garden after breakfast when Tom Palmer came up and said, "Can you spare a minute?" He would have gone to the stake rather than say 'sir.' Or most of the way.

"Delighted," Mark said; "I was about to start work, and I shall now be able to put it off with a clear conscience."

"It won't take as long as all that," Palmer said; "it's the cucumber frames by the south wall."

"What's wrong with them?"

"They're all right. Except one. And that's all wrong, and I don't know what to make of it. Fair licks me. And o' course it's the biggest and with the—well, there it is," pointing with his finger.

"Stone through it," Mark remarked; "well, boys will be boys, I suppose. Lucky it's no worse."

They were now beside the frame, four panes of which had been broken.

"Don't know about boys," Palmer said; "you feel them two cucumbers."

Mark stooped and touched them and found the rind damp and mushy.

"Look at the soil round them," Palmer said: "damp. This wasn't no accident. Something's been thrown at them cucumbers, and it wasn't a stone neither. An' it wasn't boys done it if you ask me."

"But who should do it?"

"Who? Now you're asking. But I wouldn't mind gambling Bill Hansford knows something about it."

"Hansford?"

Palmer nodded. "Gardener at *Freyne Court*. And next Sunday's Harvis' Vestival."

"I'm afraid I don't follow. What has the Harvest Festival to do with it, or Mr. Langford?"

"Hansford. Hansford's the name. Bill Hansford and a dirty little Bible-punching ferret. It's like this. All the gardeners about here, perfessional and amachure, are keen on sending in the biggest stuff for the Harvis' Vestival, and till I come here Bill Hansford ruled the blinkin' roost. And so he ought with two under-gardeners to help him. But since I come, every year I specialised in something just to beat him, and beat him I've done every year. One year it would be marrers, another apples or pears, another cucumbers, and this year it was going to be cucumbers again. That lot," with a jerk of his thumb towards the broken frame, "and now the two biggest are done in."

"The others look as big to me."

"Not them. And one or two o' them's got splashes o' something on 'em. And they haven't the shape. Look what lovely shapes they was," pointing to the damaged cucumbers: "there wouldn't have been anything to touch them; not from *Freyne Court* nor nowhere else. Them others ain't a patch on those two. Look the same to you, I daresay, but they haven't the shape. It's like legs. You see a couple o' young women coming along with legs about the same size, but strewth! what a difference. One pair just shanks, same shape all the way down like a sausage; and the other just pictures, and a fair treat to look at."

"Well, what's to be done about it?"

"Oh, legs ain't no treat to me at my age. I just said legs as a sort of—"

"I'm referring to the cucumbers."

"Ah! Now you're talking."

"Do you want me to inform the police?"

"The police?" Hastily, "I wouldn't do that. Once get the police nosing round and you never know when they're going to come poking their noses in. The less anybody has to do with the police the better. An' I know what I'm talking about. Police. Dirty rats. And any merchant seaman 'll tell you the same. Don't use their sticks except as a last resort. Bet your life. And no bashing in the cells. Bet your life. We don't want any police on this job."

"I agree. After all, it was probably an accident."

Palmer stared. "Accident! Four panes smashed and a lot o' stuff o' some sort tipped on to my best cucumbers. That wasn't no accident. It was Bill Hansford, although I can't prove it. He ain't fond o' me." He grinned faintly. "He's a Bible puncher. Pillar o' the Baptis' Tabernacle. I said to him one year, 'Funny, Mr. Hansford, ain't it? You a Bible puncher and I don't go to church, but when it comes to stuff for the Harvis' Vestival my stuff beats yourn every time. Looks as if God don't think much o' you for all your Bible punching.' That got him. He didn't know what to say to that, and he couldn't do nothing, being no bigger'n six pennorth o' apence, and so he had to bottle up his temper, and now he's done this for spite, the dirty little rat. I've 'alf a mind to lay in wait to-night. I'll gamble he'll be back to finish the job."

"I shouldn't bother. No use crying over spilt milk. Clear the mess away and ring up Crutchley's and ask them to send up a man at once to put in fresh panes."

"Better wait and see what happens to-night."

"Nothing will happen. I feel sure it was an accident. Cats, probably." And Mark sauntered away.

Palmer stood staring after him. "Cats!" he muttered; "cats! blinkin' blimey! would you believe it?"

As Mark sat in his study turning over the pages of the typescript of *Rain Before Seven* he found that the broken cucumber frame refused to be ousted from his mind. He was by no means as sure as he had pretended to Palmer that it had been

an accident. It was certainly an odd business. He did not believe Palmer's theory about Bill Hansford. His old Fleet Street habit of looking for a story behind the most trifling incident began to assert itself. Was there a story hidden here? Or was it, as he had suggested half flippantly, just cats? He pushed back the typescript and swore. He couldn't concentrate on *Rain Before Seven* while this silly affair kept intruding itself into his mind. He leaned back, filled his pipe, and sat smoking and looking out of the window. He certainly couldn't go on with this damnable job of rewriting while his mind kept circling about a broken cucumber frame. Suddenly he smiled. He hated this rewriting business: a repellent job. Wasn't that the reason he couldn't concentrate on it? Why his mind insisted on preoccupying itself with such a triviality as a broken cucumber frame? Undoubtedly that was the solution. Wasn't that what the psychologists said? What, then, was he going to do about it? About this wretched trumpery story that he knew in his bones was n.b.g.? What had Madderson said? Or was it Madderson? Chuck it away. Sound advice? Or just laziness? But what was the use of labouring over a dud? And it was a dud. He felt sure of that now. His glance wandered from the typescript to the window. A column of smoke was climbing slowly and almost vertically up from a corner of the kitchen garden. Palmer was burning rubbish. He glanced again at the typescript and remembered the hours of work it had cost him and the absurd hopes that had accompanied some of that work. He shrugged his shoulders, picked up the typescript, and taking it out to the kitchen garden tossed it on to the smoking heap of refuse, poked it until it burst into flames, and stood watching it until it was consumed.

On Tuesday evening Madderson called on him. It was his first visit to *The White Cottage* and Mark showed him round, inwardly smiling at himself for the pride and pleasure which he could not help feeling, and which he would have been inclined to deride no great time ago. They came during their round of the gardens to the cucumber frames, and Mark related the curious affair of the smashed panes and spoiled cucumbers.

"Certainly rum," Madderson said; "what did you do with them?"

"I told Palmer to put them in the incinerator." He smiled. "Palmer swore it had been done by his rival Bill something or other who's gardener at *Freyne Court*."

"Hansford," Madderson said; "but why should he do it?"

"According to Palmer, to wreck his chance of carrying off the bays at the Harvest Festival. Or," with a smile, "palm would be better. If I'd remembered any Latin from my very expensive school I could make an epigram. How would it go? *Palmam qui meruit* what?"

Madderson grinned. "Don't ask me. I never got beyond *De Senectute* and that was Greek to me. But I shouldn't think Hansford had anything to do with it. Cats, perhaps."

"Well, I thought cats; but they don't quite seem to fit the facts. But don't let's bother about it. The damned thing irritated me the whole of yesterday."

"Nothing happened last night?"

"No. Palmer said he'd half a mind to lie in wait. But the other half of his mind was the stronger."

Later, in Mark's study, wandering round looking at his books, Madderson said, "I like to see what tools a man works with; and I like to see what books he reads."

"I had tea with Superintendent Ferris and his wife the other day," Mark said: "I don't think, by the by, I've told you Ferris was in my father's Company in the War. Ferris saw me in the Market Place soon after I came here and stopped me to ask if my name were not Passmore, and after we'd stood chatting for some time he asked me to call and have tea with them. He took me up to his 'den' after tea to show me his books. He's a fine collection of books on criminology; his tools he called them. And then he trotted out his hobby, and a fascinating one it was." After Mark had described it Madderson said, "Can't say I can think of one. But I suppose there's the unique thing in every art: architecture, music, sculpture, painting. But all these are on too big a scale for me. I'd prefer to collect unique small things; say a single unique poem; I mean a unique production. There's that sonnet of Blanco White's. It's reckoned one of the greatest in the language, and he never wrote anything before or afterwards that was more than fourth rate. Amazing, that. D'you remember how it goes?"

"I can remember the closing couplet, but that's all:

*'Why do we then shun Death with anxious strife?  
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life?'*

It is astonishing that a man who for years had been writing dull theological treatises should suddenly produce what Coleridge, I believe, called the finest and most grandly conceived sonnet in our language."

Madderson nodded. "And then dried up."

"What about the single unique line?" Mark said. "Do you remember Dean Burgon's *A rose-red city half as old as time?* What a line! It came, I believe, in a long and dull poem Burgon entered for the Newdigate. And it was the only first-rate thing he wrote in a longish life largely devoted to writing. I wonder how many other men will be remembered for a single line."

"Or a single word," Madderson smiled. "'Eureka,' for example. Who was it said that: Aristotle?"

Mark laughed. "Archimedes, wasn't it? But that's hardly what we mean. Archimedes is remembered for much more than that. Is there a man remembered solely for one single word he once uttered? A single speech, yes: the dying thief's *Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.*"

"Or a single deed," Madderson said: "the soldier who made a rough cross of wood and handed it up to Joan in the flames. But a single word's a tall order."

They went later to *The Goat in Boots*, hoping to get into conversation with the Larrikin Baronet. When they entered the bar-parlour Sir Jack was standing at the counter, a mug of beer beside his elbow, talking to Ben Murray. Mark, giving his order, managed to knock the baronet's mug over, but this hoary manœuvre was wasted. Sir Jack merely said, "That's all right, cully," accepted another drink, refused to join Mark and Madderson at their table, and went on talking unconcernedly to the proprietor. He left about ten minutes later.

"There's no doubt about his being Australian," Mark said; "I've known too many not to recognise the peculiar half-Cockney accent, and I'd go further and say Sydney. I knew several men in Fleet Street who hailed from Sydney, and one, a short-story writer named Partridge, I knew pretty well; and

they'd all the same accent and it was the same as Sir Jack Borlase's. There's an odd thing about this Australian accent, and it's exemplified by Partridge and Sir Jack. The baronet was, according to rumour, reared in a Sydney slum; Partridge came from a well-to-do family and had been carefully brought up and educated. Yet their accent is the same."

"Is it odd?" Madderson asked. "Isn't it only in England that one's early environment is revealed as soon as one opens one's mouth? I don't know. It just occurred to me as possible."

Mark shook his head. "It certainly isn't so in the Old World whatever it may be in the New. A slum environment bestows the same degraded, almost bestialised accent equally upon the French, German, Italian, Spanish, and English child. There's much talk these days about a world language. What is needed first and foremost in the world is a general levelling up of the social scale so that poverty and parisitism both disappear. By the by, how does Amy Watson speak? D'you know?"

"O, Norfolk. A singsong rising at the end of each sentence to a top note that always seems to me to have something querulous about it. But it's not too bad. And compared with Cockney it's the music of the spheres. But of course Amy has a pretty voice; she sings at local concerts; a rather thin soprano." He chuckled. "She is usually followed by Mrs. Mervyn Clarke's luscious contralto. But Amy will pass muster. And, as my wife says, in a year, if she mixes with the right people, she'll be indistinguishable from any other woman of her set in the matter of dress, carriage, *savoir faire*, vocabulary, and accent. And all due to that imitative faculty so much stronger in women than in men."

"But will the right people be mixed with by the likes o' them?" Mark said, with a laugh.

"It's a pretty safe bet. A baronetcy and fifty thousand a year have a way with them."

## *Chapter Six*

### A GARDEN PARTY AND OTHER REVELS

THE last Saturday of August was traditionally a Seathorpe day of revelry. In the afternoon there was for the Quality the vicar's garden party and for the Commonalty the opening football match of the season between Seathorpe and Renham. The match, which was played on the Common, had a history dating back to the reign of George II; the rivalry was keen to bitterness; the enthusiasm and partisanship of the onlookers tumultuous. In the evening Quality and Commonalty united on the Common for dancing to the music of the town band. There were numerous stalls and itinerant sellers of fruit, confectionery, toy balloons, teasers, and confetti. Belper, the local brewer ('Belper's Tantivy Ale'), was granted a special licence for the occasion to sell fermented malt liquors from an immense marquee; and as finale there was a firework display, ending with the lighting of a huge bonfire. It was the one evening of the year when class barriers vanished, blown away by the dancing and the friendly dusk. And the first rocket that sizzled into the air and depended a candelabra of coloured lights from the heavens surprised, embraced among the clumps of gorse, lovers from the various drawers of the social chest, lovers who had been unacquainted yesterday and would be unacquainted to-morrow. It was the understood and accepted thing that these love-makings of Backle Eve (as it had always been called, no one knew why) should end with the last good night and be forgotten. But love was not always so successfully regimented, and the chronicle of Backle Eve, had one been kept, would have contained more than one story of the social descent of a young woman of gentle birth into a fisherman's cottage and the elevation of a longshoreman's pretty daughter to a mansion.

Perhaps it was a dispensation of Providence that the vicarage had a large lawn; or it may have been simply the meeting of a need. Certainly there was a large lawn at the vicarage, a very large one, almost an acre. And it was by no means too

large for the two or three hundred of the Quality who gathered there for tea, ices, cress and Gentleman's Relish sandwiches, and gossip. As the football match on the Common was a traditional revel, and one demanding the presence of all well enough to attend, so too was the vicar's garden party; and even cynical old Lord Frostenden, who was said to care for neither God, man, devil, or her ladyship, would not have absented himself while able to put one leg before the other. But that year the tradition would have been broken and *noblesse oblige* honoured in the breach as far as the representative of the oldest family in Norfolk was concerned had it not been for the cajolery of love in the person of a plebeian miss. Sir Jack Borlase declared to his sweetheart that he wasn't going to any cackling bun-fight, but would take her to the football match. But Amy, pardonable ambition, wanted to go to the garden party, and she wanted to go before her position as Lady Borlase made her invitation unavoidable. It was therefore intimated to the vicar (but more bluntly than the word suggests) that the new baronet would not be present 'without my girl'; and so Amy had her heart's desire, which entailed certain moments of embarrassment to some of the other guests and possibly to the host and hostess, although there was in their demeanour at least no sign of any internal conflict. But the presence of crapulous Bill Watson's pretty daughter, by its richness as a topic of conversation, far outweighed those few and transient embarrassments.

Mark was with the Maddersons, with the Heldars at an adjacent table. At no great distance was Sir Jack Borlase and his girl. For some time they were alone; and were left alone. The situation was tending to become awkward when the vicar was seen weaving his way from a far corner of the lawn, exchanging smiles, greetings, and mild badinage as he came. Grasping the nettle (if that be not putting it too heroically), he made straight for the couple, and with a smile and both hands extended said, "My dear Sir Jack, this is indeed a pleasure; my dear Miss Watson, how charming of you to come!" and, sitting down, began to chat away as to old and dear friends. Amy began to feel at ease; the Larrikin Baronet less like an animal in a cage. The vicar presently brought others up to the table, and by miracles of adroit introducing

soon had quite a number of tables smiling and exchanging polite chit-chat with the baronet and his girl. It was not easy going. Sir Jack, conversationally, tended to the monosyllabic; and Amy was too readily agreeing with whatever was being said to her, ringing the changes on 'O yes I *do*,' 'O I'm sure,' and 'O of course,' and with the utmost difficulty restraining herself from adding 'sir' or 'ma'am.' Many still held aloof, sitting on the fence, carefully not looking, but seeing everything. But these were utterly routed by the arrival of the Earl of Frostenden. His Lordship, dressed with something of the dandiacial swagger of a Regency buck, advanced briskly to the Larrikin Baronet's table. (Limped would be nearer the truth, for the Frostenden legs were not what they had been.) "Ah, my dear Borlase," he drawled, in a thin, high-pitched voice that was almost a neigh, "delighted to see you here; delighted. Pray introduce me to your charming lady." And the introduction being somehow achieved by the partially stunned Sir Jack, his Lordship sat down at the table, chatted away, laughed, paid great attention to Amy (with an eagerness that evoked whispered comments from far tables), and ended by carrying them both off to be introduced to old Lady Frostenden, who was, he declared, impatient to meet them. This was pretty good going for the fisherman's daughter and her larrikin lover; but Amy was now beginning to feel her feet; to feel she was carrying things off; to feel that she could continue with ease to carry them off, however difficult or awkward. Even the Larrikin Baronet was opening out; he was smiling; he was venturing beyond monosyllables; he was no longer avoiding glances; his eyes had softened; the lines about his mouth loosened; once or twice he laughed. Things were going well; they were going very well; people ceased to glance covertly towards them, looking openly, and slowly away again; people ceased to whisper about them; ceased to talk about them; found other topics; forgot them.

For there were plenty of other topics: Sybil Cunningham, the Rev. Cyril Staines, and Mrs. Cunningham, for example. It was a topic equally suitable for the sympathetic, the uncharitable, the cynical, and the flippant; and they made the most of it. The sympathy went to Sybil, and it was general. She was so obviously in love with the tall, handsome, and

excessively virile curate; and she could not hide it. And it was painfully clear that she was prepared to prostrate herself before him and be trodden upon out of gratitude for his love. It was clear also to everyone but little plain mousy Sybil that the Rev. Cyril was performing a task, an unpleasant, reluctant but profitable task, and that to compensate himself for the unpleasantness he was, as far as he dared, not only trampling upon her, but seeking consolation in brighter and prettier eyes: he paid almost fulsome attention to Lesley, to Alison, to old Rust's adopted daughter Joyce Filmer, to Hazel Dauncey—to all the pretty young women there, who, he believed, had long been hopelessly in love with him. Or rather he paid what attentions he could; what attentions Mrs. Cunningham permitted him to pay; they were not many. Whatever Sybil was prepared to endure both immediately and in the future, her mother did not propose to stand any nonsense. She and the vicar were paying the piper and Cyril had to dance to their tune; and she kept him dancing before the watching eyes of all there; dancing attendance on Sybil and on her; running round with messages; trotting about with more and more relays of sandwiches. She kept the whip cracking; she kept him performing. It was like the show of a dancing bear. And as cruel. She was unconsciously compensating herself for the humiliations and ignominies of her life with the Rev. Xavier Cunningham, whom her parents had bought for her. Yet she was a partner (a willing, eager, and anxious partner) with the vicar in the purchase of the Rev. Cyril Staines for Sybil.

The Maddersons and the Heldars had moved their tables together. They were enjoying the many playlets and scenes being staged there on the vicar's big lawn for all who had the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

Suddenly Lesley said, with surprising vehemence: "Isn't Cyril Staines noisome?"

Her brother laughed: "O I don't know!" he said; "he's only running true to type, isn't he?"

"And his mother's spoiling," Dr. Heldar said.

"And all the other silly females who fussed over the pretty boy," Madderson said.

"Something ought to be done about pretty boys to prevent

their growing up into beautiful and loathsome young men," Alison said.

"The mothers are largely to blame, I am sure," Mrs. Heldar said. "I think there's much truth in the old saying that mothers make men."

"Or don't make them," Alison said; "what do you think, Mr. Passmore?"

Mark smiled. "It was my father made me, if anyone did; I lost my mother when I was six."

"There's no bigger tragedy than a little boy's mother dying," Madderson said; and then he grinned faintly: "not too tactfully put, I'm afraid."

"My mother didn't die," Mark said; "she left my father." He felt himself committed willy-nilly to something more of the story, and felt annoyed to find himself in such a position. "My father was blinded and crippled in the War," he went on, "and my mother fell in love with Sir Hubert Trent. My father had the utmost sympathy for her, declaring that no woman could be expected to endure such a burden, and that for better or worse did not envisage (or ought not to) such cases as his. I last saw my mother, as a child, when I was eleven, just before she and Trent went abroad. And shortly after that a miracle occurred: my father regained his sight and the use of his legs and married again, and now I have an eight-year-old half-brother." He smiled. "I really don't know how I came to inflict these personal affairs on you. The sequel is rather oddly interesting, and since you've all swallowed the pill so amiably I won't withhold the spot of jam. Some years ago Sir Hubert Trent contested a by-election in Northam. He was the Government candidate, and the Government very much wanted to retain the seat. His opponent was a local man with a big following. There was a tremendous unloading of Government spell-binders and big-wigs into the constituency; feeling ran high; and there were incidents. And so *The Morning Courier* sent me down to cover the election, and I, of course, ran into Lady Trent, my own mother; and she didn't know me: didn't know me from Adam. It was something of a shock." He smiled. "I had the romantic notion that mothers would always know their sons however long they had been parted and however young the boy had been at the time. I

had always thought Masefield's lovely poem to his mother, *C.L.M.*, untrue in that respect, notably and especially the two lines :

*I am so grown. If we should meet  
She would pass by me in the street.*

I didn't believe it. Blood, I said, would call to blood; she would know instinctively. And here was my own mother not only passing me by in the street but being on the same platform, in the same room, with me and completely failing to recognise me."

"And did you," Lesley said, the faintest trace of hesitation in her voice, "make yourself known to her?"

"No. I don't know why I didn't. I couldn't make up my mind. I was sorry afterwards I hadn't."

"Sir Hubert was defeated, wasn't he?" Madderson said.

Mark nodded. "I think that decided him to abandon any notion of entering upon a political career, for they went abroad shortly afterwards and have not been in England since."

The vicar had by now managed to retrieve Sir Jack Borlase and Amy from the orbit of the Earl and Countess of Frostenden. It had not been difficult, for Lady Frostenden was very deaf, and his Lordship was soon bored with the consequence of what had been no more than one of his perverse quirks and was delighted to be rid of the encumbrance. The vicar was equally delighted to embrace it, being determined that the Borlase family pew should no longer affront him by its conspicuous and unprecedented emptiness.

Sir Jack proved unexpectedly easy. His bud was slowly opening to the sun of that afternoon's experience. He listened with a seemingly absorbed and flattering attention while the vicar expatiated upon the history of Seathorpe; and even when the Rev. Xavier, finding things so easy, began to lay on with a trowel, he did not wince; rather did he seem to bask in the excessive warmth. "The Borlase title and family," said the vicar, "have always been one of the boasts of Seathorpe, whose boundaries include your estate, my dear Sir Jack. The name of Borlase is part of the history of Norfolk, of England. There is no name older or more honourable in the Kingdom.

In our beautiful church there are many effigies of your great ancestors; worn flags and barely decipherable brasses (so far back go their names) commemorating their deeds and their fame." The vicar lowered his voice; there was almost anguish in it as he said, "How can I, then, my dear Sir Jack, but be sad when Sunday after Sunday I see that family pew, wherein so many of your ancestors have knelt in worship, empty? Forgive me if I seem unduly moved. I am moved. I find this breaking away from so long a succession a lamentable thing. I do not think I can find words to describe with what happiness I should find that pew once more occupied by its rightful owner. Am I hoping too much?"

Much of the vicar's verbiage had passed by the Larrikin Baronet, and he had allowed it to flow over him without bothering to listen. He was quickly aware what the vicar wanted of him, and the Rev. Xavier might have saved his breath and put a blunt query in half a dozen words, for the result would have been the same: a smiling affirmative. The vicar was effusively grateful, and hesitated whether or not to strike the hot iron immediately in the matter of the Church Restoration Fund; but, concluding he had done enough for one day, refrained and began to chat of parish affairs in general.

It was at this juncture that one of the maids bearing a tray of refilled teapots tripped and shot them on to the grass, making a great mess and splashing a few ankles. She was a pretty girl, the prettier for her flushed embarrassment, and several young men hastened to her assistance. The vicar, with great forbearance, went over to the little group with an agreeable smile and trotted out the trite sayings and saws demanded by the occasion. He stood a moment beaming round upon the clustered tables, and then he said loudly, and in the voice usually reserved for the pulpit, "Dear me! that reminds me of a most extraordinary thing that occurred at the vicarage last night." He paused while a pleasant rustle of expectancy flattered his ears, and those people almost or quite outside the range of his voice began a buzz of: 'What's the vicar saying?' 'Is he making an announcement?' 'I can't hear a word.' 'How annoying!' 'Why doesn't he use one of those loud-speaker things!' 'Shush!' 'If he'd only speak up.' . . .

The vicar did his best, but he could not very well bawl. He was merely relating casually a strange incident, and anything much above a conversational tone would sound ludicrous. "A most extraordinary thing," he went on. "Simple enough, I have no doubt, if one knew the explanation; but what *is* the explanation? But let me tell you. Cook discovered when she went to the pantry this morning a large pool of liquid on the floor. Quite a large pool. The pantry window was open. She did not think it was water. She said it did not feel like water. An odd remark perhaps, but corroborated by the maid who presently wiped it up. Nothing had been broken in the pantry; nothing spilt." The vicar's smile beamed round again and he spread his white, well-shaped hands: "Quite an intriguing little mystery."

And while all those tables who had heard discussed the affair, from politeness rather than interest, the vicar made his way to the remoter parts of the lawn and repeated his tale several times. There were few theories: the obvious one of cats being the favourite. It was simply 'cats,' further details being left to the imagination by all except Sir Jack Borlase, who created a momentary embarrassment among the more nice by declaring: "You'd know if it was cats by the stink; did it stink like cats?" No one answered. The vicar, who perhaps knew, was too far off. The affair as a topic waned, flickered up here and there, and died.

On the Common Seathorpe had defeated Renham 6-0. It was Seathorpe's first victory for five years, and was the most crushing defeat ever inflicted in the long history of the games. Seathorpe intended to celebrate: it promised to be a night: a Night in fact.

The dancing and the fun would not begin in earnest until twilight drew near, and this gave the Quality an opportunity for an early dinner before joining the revels. Mark dined with the Maddersons, and then the two parties walked over the Common, whose fringes came almost to their gardens, so that within a very few moments they were in the thick of the fun, already noisy and with that touch of boisterousness apt at any moment to transform revelry into riot.

Mark danced decorously with Mrs. Madderson and Mrs. Heldar; with Alison; with Lesley. But as the twilight dark-

ened it was impossible to keep touch; one continually lost companions and found them again. Dancing was promiscuous. You danced with whoever was nearest when the music began. As the darkness deepened the dancers held each other more closely; faces brushed; kisses were exchanged; ever and again couples stole away to lie among the shelter of the gorse.

Mark had been dancing with a passionate young girl whose wild kissing had stirred him; and when the music ceased she had laughed and, taking his hand, dragged him out of the crowd; and presently, breathless, they had sat down among the gorse. The girl lay down close to him, but he remained sitting, leaning on one elbow, looking up at the stars. This passionate youngster had indeed stirred him, but not for her; and when she put an arm about his neck and drew him down beside her, pressing her mouth to his, she moved him only to a faint disgust, so that he welcomed the band's sudden blaring of a waltz and got up and, taking her hand, drew her up and said, "Come along, let's dance." She danced with him back into the crowd, silent, sulky; and then, without a word, she released herself and slipped away.

Mark felt he had had enough, more than enough of dancing. He was hot and thirsty. He thought of cutting off to *The Club* for a drink; or of trying to find Madderson or Heldar in the now swarming, jostling, scuffling, uproarious crowd and suggesting this. He began to look about, peering at the dark shapes that circled about him or rushed and pushed by, shouting and screaming. And suddenly he came upon Lesley. She was alone, and her voice and manner told how glad she was to see him. "O Mr. Passmore," she said, and paused; and then: "this is rather dreadful, isn't it?" He detected a faint note of agitation in her voice, and wondered who had frightened her and what had happened. "It is, rather," he said; "shall we dance?" "It's too hot," she replied; and presently, without any more said, they were walking away across the Common towards the river, leaving the eddying, heaving, vast dark bulk of the crowd behind them. It was no longer a sober crowd. Drunken bawlings and shrieking hysterical laughter followed them; grew less distinct; fainter and fainter; and became at last a remote ululation.

For some time they walked in silence, and then Lesley said,

"I think it's a mistake to have alcoholic drinks at these open-air dances. It spoils them. It makes them unpleasant and dangerous." She paused a moment and then added vehemently, "I think drinking can be beastly."

"No doubt at all about that. It ought to be cut right out of such jamborees as this," Mark said. "Sam would have been pretty disgusted. And what a text he'd have made of it."

"And he'd have been right," Lesley said; "but of course not altogether right. But Sam won't compromise. It's all or nothing with him. Blacks and whites. But there is a pleasant and civilised side to drinking. Wine does add to the amenities of social intercourse. So does smoking, for that matter. I suppose any habit commonly shared does. But smoking hasn't the justification of wine-drinking. Or I don't think it has. I'm sure it hasn't for me. I often ask myself why I smoke. I really don't believe I derive any pleasure from it, and I am sure complete deprivation wouldn't bother me at all."

"It's always been a debated point," Mark said, "what is the pleasure of smoking. I don't know; but I certainly derive a great deal of pleasure from it. And it is not only a pleasure in itself, but it adds to the enjoyment of other pleasures. I enjoy a book more when I've a pipe in my mouth, although I think one probably reads with less attention, for if I try to work with a pipe it goes out. I enjoy a show more when I'm smoking and I always regret more theatres don't permit it, although I think those that do are wrong: it must tend to spoil the enjoyment of non-smokers. I rate smoking high among the sensory pleasures of life."

"Wouldn't sensual be the better word? Sensory refers to all the senses, but you are not thinking of such pleasures as music or visual beauty."

"Fleshly would probably be the best word," Mark said: "but it has come to have such a limited, almost a censorious interpretation."

They had by now reached the river, about a mile from its mouth. They sat down upon the low parapet of an old wharf whose mouldering broken timbers and rusted bollards made in the light of the newly risen moon fantastic shadows in the faintly lapping water beneath them. That part of the river was known as Blackshore, and it was the first time Mark had

been there. All about them the scene was desolate and derelict with rotting wharves and landing stages, tumbledown sheds, windowless and partly roofless warehouses, and here and there the waterlogged hull of a boat left to decay in the shallows.

"I don't often come to Blackshore," Lesley said; "it is too depressing, saddening; such scenes always are, I suppose."

"They remind us too much of mortality perhaps," Mark said; "and of the vanity of much of human endeavour."

"This angers me too," Lesley said; "for it need not have happened. It is just laziness, inertia. Seathorpe was once a thriving port; it rivalled Grimsby, Harwich, and Lowestoft; it sent sloops to fight against the Armada; it had a big fleet of trawlers which went every year to the Iceland fishery; and ships up to four hundred tons could use its harbour. Even so short a time ago as fifty years the river was navigable for smacks and trawlers and there was a prosperous fishing industry. But the river began to silt up quite suddenly. No one knew quite why and no one bothered. Some change in currents lower down or higher up the coast; or because of tide scour. No one did anything until it was too late. The river mouth silted up until only a dinghy could enter and the fishing industry died and left this," with a gesture of her hand. "A few perfunctory efforts had been made at dredging and a few more were made from time to time; but these were abandoned owing to the expense. To keep a dredger constantly at work would have meant a threepenny rate, and so for the sake of saving that threepenny rate a thriving industry was allowed to die. And a town to die with it. For Seathorpe is dead."

Mark laughed. "It is a noisy corpse at the moment," he said; "and not without a touch of the spectacular," as half a dozen rockets soared remotely over the Common and burst in a dazzling shower.

"It is dead for all that. People stagnate. And as for the children, when they leave school there is nothing for them to do but enter shops or, for the luckiest, the post office or Town Clerk's office. But no one bothers. On the contrary, Seathorpe is supremely satisfied with itself, and no small proportion of its people are glad the fishing has left the place. They can

now stagnate in peace and quiet like a sow on a midden. O there's the set piece. Can you make out the King and Queen?"

"Too far away. When is the bonfire?"

"As soon as the set piece is over. We had better be going. What is it?"

"Just eleven."

"We can keep clear of the crowd if we make a detour towards the sea. I've had enough of crowds for one night." With a little laugh: "I just feel I don't love humanity in the mass to-night." Presently, as they walked over the closely cropped grass, she said, "I wonder why the vicar made such a story of his pantry floor. It seemed such a trivial affair."

"Yes. But I suppose most things, perhaps all things, are, or appear to be, trivial in their first stages: the first trickle and run of snow that is to become an avalanche; the first puff of subterranean steam that one day will erupt an earthquake; even life itself began on earth in so trivial a thing as a speck of protoplasm."

"Did it?" Lesley said, an amused note in her voice.

Mark laughed. "Well, probably. But I really don't care. If it were not that it was doubtless something equally simple, equally trivial."

"So you rule out God?"

"Well, I do for myself. But life beginning on earth in a speck of protoplasm, even if that speck were produced chemically by the action of the sun on some exudation of a marine plant, does not necessarily rule out God as the creator of the whole universe. I mean it does not logically rule him out. It would be quite reasonable for a creator to choose such a method of creation in preference to the more spectacular *Fiat lux!* technique."

"Are you interested in that sort of thing? Biology, and so on?"

"Well, moderately. I'm interested in many things. I've the curious, the inquiring, type of mind."

"Men have, much more than women. Or so Dick always says. And I think it's true."

"I think so too. I think it is one of the few really fundamental sex differences there are."

Returning from church the next morning, Mark was joined

by Madderson, who said, "Has it occurred to you that there might be some connection between what happened in the vicar's pantry and to your cucumber frame?"

"It did occur to me, but I dismissed it on the grounds of probability."

"Of probability?"

"Yes. When I used to be sent out to cover stories for *The Courier* I soon discovered that the probable was invariably wrong."

"And that the improbable was invariably right?"

"I wouldn't say invariably. Frequently. But the curse of my job was that you very soon began to see 'stories' not only in the most unlikely places, which was as it should be and meant you were learning the craft, but in places where there just wasn't a story at all, which meant that your unconscious mind set to and invented a yarn and palmed it off upon your conscious mind as the authentic story behind the affair you were investigating. And so nowadays I'm rather chary about stories that seem to be lurking behind commonplace incidents and I tend to the other extreme," with a smile: "that there's no story behind anything until someone invents it. So I refuse to see any connection between the vicar's pantry and my cucumber frame, and I deride the notion that there is a story behind either incident."

### *Chapter Seven*

#### MR. FERRIS AND MR. PALMER ARE ANECDOTAL

THE following Thursday afternoon Mark played golf with Dr. Heldar. As they walked across to the first tee they passed Sir Jack Borlase, who was having a lesson from Bunbury, the professional. He nodded towards them with an agreeable smile. "Seeing how successful the vicar had been," Heldar said, "in roping him in for church, I thought I'd try golf, and he was immensely pleased, and will be elected at the next Committee meeting. He has never handled a club before, but Bunbury tells me he shows an amazing

aptitude; that he has arms like steel rods; and hit a drive off the first tee into the Keyhole, which is all of three hundred yards. I wonder what hard work built that wiry iron frame."

Mark nodded. "And what gave those harsh lines to his face: he can't be thirty."

Mark won by two and one, and as they sat afterwards in the Clubhouse Heldar said ruefully, "I'm getting old. Fifty's young nowadays, as some of my colleagues are fond of saying in their anonymous articles in the popular Press. Of course it's not true. Fifty's fifty; always has been and always will be. At fifty you are only half the man physically you were at thirty. It's astonishing and humiliating how poorly and feebly at fifty one does the things that at thirty one did so well and so effortlessly. Old age is a depressing prospect. It is supposed to have its compensations. I don't know what they are. One pretends. I imagine that is all there is in it."

His pause chanced to coincide with a momentary lull in the hum about the bar, and they heard Prosper Fellowes's rather strident voice saying, "Most extraordinary thing. Can't explain it at all. One of those footling yet puzzling—" The renewal of the hum blotted out the rest of Fellowes's story. But he presently came over to their table and sat down, obviously pleased to have two new ears for his tale. "Extraordinary thing happened in my house last night," he said; "in my study to be exact. The curb of the fireplace is a large marble slab about six inches high, and in front of it I have a tiger-skin rug. The tiger was shot by my father. He was addicted to blood sports; which perhaps explains my hatred for them, and of him. For of course I hated him. So many sons do. But that's neither here nor there. My study is not a tidy place. It's my workshop, and those enemies of orderly disorder, females, are not allowed to enter. So you would not be surprised to find standing on the curb a small aquarium. There was one standing there all day yesterday and last night. It was empty. There is no doubt at all about that, and it must be borne in mind. It had had no drop of liquid in it for months, months. I sometimes used it as a waste-paper basket when my others were full. But it was quite empty last evening when, shortly before half-past seven, I left my study to dress for dinner. I did not go into my study

again until nine o'clock this morning, nine being the time I invariably begin the day's work. Invariably. I keep office hours and I keep them as strictly as if I had to clock in and clock out like a clerk. That is the only way I can get through the immense amount of work I have to do. When I entered, the window of my study, the one nearest the fireplace, was open. It had been open, at the bottom, all night. It always is. And the other window at the top. This is the ideal arrangement for perfect ventilation, which I could demonstrate to you quite simply if I had a pencil with me and the time. So far everything was normal and as I expected to find it. But when I looked towards the fireplace that was another story. The aquarium was broken and the pieces lying on the rug. And that was not all. Not in the least. That was explicable. An especially heavy lorry jolting by during the night might have done it. Or a tremor of the earth, of which there are far more in this country, and especially along the east coast, than people realise, or the seismologists will admit. I have records extending back more than ten years. When I publish those records many people will find hitherto inexplicable happenings made clear. But not my broken aquarium. That was no earthquake. What it was I do not know. I cannot conceive. And I cannot conceive because there was something else there besides the broken aquarium. A large patch of my tiger-skin rug, a patch extending from the occipital region to the ninth vertebra, was soaked. Saturated. What do you think of that?"

Mark and Heldar exchanged glances, and Heldar said, "Saturated with what?"

"Precisely," Fellowes said, "precisely. I don't know. Why don't I? *Cherchez la femme*. My wife had the rug hung out to dry while I was out shopping this morning. Deplorable. Infuriating. But true. You see why I must keep my study inviolate from marauding females."

Mark nodded. "It's a pity you don't know what the stuff was. That would certainly have helped."

"And it might have been a clue to the vicar's affair," Heldar said.

"The vicar's affair!" Fellowes said eagerly. "Why, what was that?"

"I'd forgotten you were not at the garden party," Heldar said.

"I never go to garden parties. On humanitarian principles. But what was this affair? Do tell me." And when Heldar had told him he clapped both his hands on his knees in real or affected excitement. "But this is amazing!" he exclaimed, his voice peculiarly near the falsetto.

Mark, amused at his reception of Dr. Heldar's account of the vicar's pantry incident, thought he might add a little more to the fire, and related the matter of his cucumber frame. Fellowes rewarded him by an even greater display of excited interest. "Tremendous!" he said; "absolutely startling. But what is the explanation?"

"Coincidence, probably," Mark said; "just a series of similar accidents," to which Dr. Heldar nodded agreement.

"I don't believe in coincidence," Fellowes said. "Apart from its being inartistic, there's no such thing really. I mean absolutely. No one thing can coincide with another. Not absolutely. And so coincidences are only apparent. They don't happen. Now I wonder if I examined some of the hair under a microscope . . . that seems to promise something . . . by George of course! . . . do forgive me . . ." and he hurried away.

As Fellowes vanished with some precipitancy, Dr. Heldar cocked an eye at Mark and smiled. "Pity his nerves do him such an ill-service. That affectation is all nerves. And he's over-sensitive. I once heard him say he'd one skin fewer than normal people, and there's some truth in it. I've known him do some extremely generous things and then, literally, blush to find them known. But it is rather odd about his rug coming so soon after the pantry business and your cucumbers; don't you think so?"

"I don't think there's much in it. It occurred to me while Fellowes was talking that the aquarium hadn't been empty. Apparently his study is such a junk shop and in such a general mess and litter that he wouldn't know whether the thing was empty or not. And I thought he protested its emptiness too much, which seemed to me to point to his own doubts in the matter. Of course if it *were* empty the thing would be a little odd, in conjunction with the others."

"Also," Heldar said, "if the aquarium had held water it would have been too heavy to have been moved by a passing lorry or Fellowes's suppositional earthquake. It depends on the amount of water, of course, but I was thinking of five or six inches, which would be a considerable weight. According to Dick water accounts for a fourth of the earth's weight. Or perhaps it's a fortieth. By the by, he's returning to Cambridge to-morrow. If you'd care to dine with us this evening I'm sure he'd appreciate it: there'll just be the four of us."

During dinner Dick, who was reading mathematics at Cambridge and would be sitting for the mathematical tripos the following year, said, "What I shall do when I come down I don't know; drift into one of the higher branches of the C.S., I suppose; that seems to be the dismal fate of mathematicians with no bent for physics or chemistry. I'm a pure mathematician; nothing else. Mine's the sort of mind specially created for the C.S. I wonder how many men deliberately choose a career and how many drift into one."

"My father chose mine for me more or less," Mark said; and having related the circumstances, he added, "I've sometimes—in fact, frequently—wondered if my choice were a wise one, and whether by missing a university I did not miss something valuable and not to be acquired in any other way."

"I doubt it," Dick said.

His father nodded agreement: "I had four years at Cambridge, but I don't think those years bestowed on me a hallmark or gave me something not to be acquired elsewhere in other ways. I think it was different in medieval times, when they did bestow something; for the life was a more corporate thing then. It was similar to that of a public school to-day. In fact, the medieval universities, and, indeed, right up to the Reformation, were simply public schools; boys usually went there at twelve or thirteen; many even younger. The universities did then what the public schools do to-day: they turned out a recognisable article. Of course, if you propose to adopt any of the learned professions, of which," with a smile at Mark, "authorship apparently isn't one, then you must go to a university, and there the snob element enters. And that snob element says, or implies, that there are only two universities in the United Kingdom: Oxford and Cambridge. The

others are—well, just the others: riff-raff. That the standard for a pass or an honours degree is far higher at London, Glasgow, and Trinity College, Dublin, than at Oxford or Cambridge does not matter in the least: they are for all that universities for the riff-raff. And of course the snob element is reactionary. That is why it was left to London to open to women university careers and the professions."

"Men make a great parade," Lesley said, "about the opening of careers to women; but what does it amount to?"

"That's Alison's thunder," Dick laughed.

"It's all women's thunder. The Church is closed to women. In theory the law is open, but how many women solicitors and barristers are there? How many law officers? Is there even a single stipendiary magistrate a woman? In medicine we do ostensibly get a show, but it is only ostensibly; in practice women doctors in public appointments are subordinate to men and receive a lower salary; as for the plums of the profession, they are reserved entirely for men. What humbugs men are!"

"At any rate," Dick said, "the arts make no distinction. You get the same money for your fairy-tales and drawings as a man would."

"Even that isn't true," Lesley said; "not entirely. A man would be offered more for commissioned work than a woman. And if it were some work considered of national importance, such as a statue of some general, or plans for a cathedral, or even a painting of some state ceremonial, no woman would be offered it; and if by some oversight she were, a howl of protest would go up all over the country."

"Led by the women," Dick said.

Lesley laughed. "You think that's true," she said; "or you pretend to; but it isn't."

"There's some truth in it, my dear," her mother said, "or we should have had a woman Premier by now. Politics is as open to women as to men. It is not only that men prefer the male practitioner, whether in medicine, law, politics, dentistry, or what not, but women do themselves. Even in so feminine a thing as nursing men in the services, according to Sam, prefer the male to the female nurse. And, you remember, when it was proposed to appoint a woman doctor

to our cottage hospital it was Mrs. Duquesne who most bitterly opposed it and threatened to withdraw her annual subscription of five hundred pounds, which the hospital couldn't afford to lose."

"By the by," Dick said, "I met Mrs. Duquesne in the Market Place this morning."

"I hope you didn't suggest to her that her complaints are imaginary," his father smiled; "they paid your school fees and they're keeping you at Cambridge."

"She wouldn't have listened to me," Dick said; "she was too full of her story. I think she'd been parading Seathorpe buttonholing all and sundry, holding them with her plump hand and not too glittering eye while she outdid the Ancient Mariner. Some scoundrel, she said, had last night deliberately forced the window of her morning-room and had saturated the sofa, a fine Chippendale in yellow satin, with some horrible liquid. She said she rang up the police immediately it was discovered, about nine o'clock apparently, but nothing had been done about it, and it was then eleven." Dick grinned. "She's lived in Seathorpe all her life and expects something to be done in a couple of hours. Seathorpe won't do anything about the Last Trump in under a week. What are you two looking so knowing about?" smiling over to his father and Mark.

"Just a coincidence," his father said; "or probably—eh. Mr. Passmore?"

Mark shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said, with a smile, "I'm beginning to be shaken in my conviction about coincidences."

"Why, what's happened?" Lesley asked.

"Simply that Mr. Prosper Fellowes in the Golf Club this afternoon was explaining how an empty aquarium in his study had been broken, probably by an earthquake according to himself, and a tiger-skin rug on the hearth saturated with some liquid. What liquid he didn't know, as his wife had had the rug dried; but after relating the affair he suddenly dashed away to put some of the hairs under his microscope. Taken in conjunction with Mrs. Duquesne's story it certainly is odd."

"And the vicar's pantry," Lesley said.

"And Mr. Passmore's cucumbers," Dr. Heldar added. "Certainly an odd chain of events."

"It looks rather as if some practical joker were at work," Lesley said.

Her father shook his head. "Seathorpe doesn't play practical jokes. It isn't done. Not by the natives. If there *is* a practical joker at work it must be a foreigner; and obviously," with a dry little smile directed at Mark, "a newcomer."

Mark laughed. "But what about my cucumbers?"

"That would be your craftiness," Lesley smiled.

"Well, I think it all very odd; very odd indeed," Mrs. Heldar said; "and that reminds me that when I was in Chapman's this morning Mrs. Golding came in and she was full of something queer that had happened at their house last night. She said that she and her husband had been woken about an hour or so after midnight by a scuffling, dragging noise downstairs; but when Hubert went down to investigate there was nothing to be seen. The window of the breakfast-room was open, but it was often left open at night, although neither of them could remember whether or not it had been left open that night, and Hubert invariably does a round of the rooms before they go up to bed, since the fire at the Plowdens'."

Dr. Heldar raised his eyebrows and leaned back in his chair. "H'm," he said, his tone lightly but not jocosely judicial, "it does begin to seem that here's a chain of events that are adding up to something; but just what I can't see. I can't see at all. If there *is* any connection between these quite astonishingly similar events they don't seem to make sense."

"Except on the assumption of a practical joker," Dick said. "That would cover them all. But if you rule him out I admit that the whole thing seems inexplicable; grotesque."

"Glad you appreciate the fact that women don't play practical jokes," Lesley said.

"Do I?" he smiled. "Oh, him. I used it quite unconsciously; but you're right; women don't play practical jokes. Now why the devil is that?"

"They're grown up," Lesley said.

"These poltergeist happenings," Mark said, "aren't they almost invariably brought home to adolescent girls?"

"It's pubescent hysteria," Dr. Heldar said.

"Invariably?" Mark said. "Would you entirely rule out practical joking?"

"I think so. I agree with Lesley that practical joking is a male failing; but not with her reason."

"But men are childish, Father," Lesley said; "and no woman is. And look how common mother-fixation is. But does father-fixation exist at all outside books on psychiatry?"

"Undoubtedly it does. To a much greater extent than you'd believe. Just as fathers in love with their daughters is a by no means uncommon emotional condition. I have always thought that was the explanation of the Crickmay tragedy. Shelley wrote very acutely about this by-way of human love; as he wrote acutely about most things."

"We're getting a long way from the Great Seathorpe Mystery!" Dick laughed. "Do we all give it up?"

"Have you a plausible explanation? Come; you're a mathematician. Can't you suggest something?"

Dick shook his head. "Not a mathematician's line at all, Father. I doubt if Einstein would associate jam on his son's face with a recent raid on the larder."

Walking home about eleven, Mark came upon Superintendent Ferris, who said, "In a hurry for bed?" and when Mark said No, he wasn't particularly tired, Ferris, who was going off duty, suggested they should stroll along the front. Presently Ferris said, "I've had a trying day, what with one thing and another. Do you happen to have heard of our Mrs. Duquesne?"

Mark nodded. "Yes. This evening for the first time. I've been dining with the Heldars, and Dick Heldar had been buttonholed by the good lady, who is, I gathered, something of a character."

"Something is putting it mildly. Am I right in saying she'd a tale to tell Mr. Heldar about a soaked sofa?"

"That was the tale."

"She was on to the Station before half-past nine this morning, and continued to ring us at half-hourly intervals to ask what we were doing about the scandalous outrage (her words), and so I called round at her house; it's the big ivy-covered house next to the old saltworks, *Bly Villa*. The house was built by her late husband, who was as eccentric as herself, and

the place is an architectural oddity. You may have noticed it. From a distance it seems almost entirely of glass, and it is, in fact, more an arrangement of huge windows than a house; but they can all be covered by internal rolling shutters. The windows in the morning-room, where the thing had happened, are twelve feet high and six wide, and there are two of them. Under the one nearer the door is a large cactus plant in a tub, and directly beside the plant was the damaged sofa, a fine bit of Chippendale in gold satin. Something had been upset on the sofa and had saturated a large area of it.

"Mrs. Duquesne declared that the top of the window had been found open; that the maids were sure it hadn't been left open; and they all denied having anything to do with the state of the sofa. I saw the maids and had a few words with them, more for the sake of appearances than in the hope of getting anything out of them. I feel pretty certain they were lying; or one of them was; that she had upset something on to the sofa, was afraid to confess (Mrs. Duquesne is a real tartar, and the only way she gets maids to endure her tantrums and temper is by paying double the current rate of wages), and to lend colour to the notion that it had been done by someone from outside opened the window at the top. A drain-pipe, by the way, runs down by the side of the window.

"But when I suggested to Mrs. Duquesne that it was no doubt one of the maids and was a perfectly simple and straightforward case of accident, subterfuge, and lying, she wouldn't hear of it and abused me like a fishwife." He paused a moment to relight his pipe. "Mrs. Duquesne," he went on, "is a very generous donor to the Police charities and is always good for fifty pounds for the sports fund. So we—er—make allowances."

He was silent for a moment or so and then he continued, "She is an extremely queer old bird. She's an ardent spiritualist and a believer in the secrets of the Pyramids, whose dimensions apparently furnish a key to all future events to the end of time. She is a fanatical water-drinker, never drinking even tea, and holds that cold water is the universal panacea, both taken internally and, in time of sickness, as a cold compress over the affected part. Her household staff have to fall into line; another reason why she has to pay double wages. She

had to make an exception when it came to engaging a chauffeur, for she failed to find a man who would take the job on those terms, and she wouldn't engage a woman. She'd sooner die than take alcohol, and *Bly Villa* is absolutely dry. Smoking she declares a filthy habit. Yet at the annual Sprat Supper for fishermen in November she pays for two pints of beer a head and an ounce of tobacco and a packet of cigarettes. A queer old woman, but one to be placated. She's really a soft-hearted old thing and her tempers and tantrums are just barking. But of course she can be very trying."

"You feel sure it was an accident?"

"Yes. As sure as it's safe to feel about anything."

"Did you hear about Mr. Fellowes's tiger-skin rug?"

"No."

Having told him, Mark reminded him of the vicar's pantry, mentioned the cucumber frame, and wound up with the Goldings' account of the dragging, scuffling sounds in the night.

But Ferris was not impressed. "Our plump Town Clerk is addicted to belly worship," he said, "and Mrs. H. G. is no ascetic. What did they have for supper and how soon after eating it did they go to bed? I don't think we need look any further than that as far as their affair is concerned. A maid was responsible for the accident at Mrs. Duquesne's and in all probability at the vicar's. Fellowes, I should say without any doubt, knowing him, was himself responsible. He quite believes, of course, that the aquarium was empty; but I don't; not for a moment. He's a completely unreliable witness in such matters. As for your frame, a boy with a catapult and later a nocturnal cat will account for it."

"Isn't the fact that they've all happened within a week rather odd, significant?"

"Just a coincidence."

"A bit tall, isn't it?"

"O good Lord, no. I should hardly call it a coincidence at all. In any town hundreds of similar accidents and mishaps occur every day. It just happens that these were made public and their similarity seems significant." He smiled. "It is in a way, of course, significant; significant of the sameness of human beings and all their little ways. But coincidence, no. Not what I should call one."

Mark laughed. "And what *would* you call one? Or don't you recognise such a thing? Fellowes denies that they exist. Probably only for effect."

"Yes. A failing of his. I certainly don't deny they exist. In November 1916 I was on the Somme. I was then a private. We had to make a raid and collar as many Jerries as we could. We were anyhow to make certain of one. As soon as we jumped down into Jerry's trench I threatened a young German with my bayonet at his belly, and he put up his hands and came with me like a lamb. I made off back with him without waiting for the others. Halfway back Jerry put down a hell of a barrage between the lines and swept it with machine-gun fire. I dodged into a big shell hole, lugging my prisoner in with me. We had to sit there an hour before it was safe to leave. He could speak quite a little English and it was fairly light, and we showed each other photographs and grinned and got on very well, and I eventually got him and myself safely back to our trench. He was the only Jerry we got; or the only one we got back; and out of our raiding party of ten, including a sergeant and a young second loot, only the boy officer (he'd only left school a few months) and three other men besides myself got back. I was only nineteen at the time. The colonel offered me my choice of a recommendation for the M.M. or immediate promotion to full corporal with pay. I took the promotion, and the Old Man threw in a ten days' leave to Blighty.

"More than ten years afterwards I was on my honeymoon in Berlin. Our luggage had been put out at a wrong station, and so the first morning we were there I went out to get a shave. It was a big saloon, and I sat down in one of the chairs, not noticing the assistant. When he'd lathered me he picked up a razor and said, 'Shall I cut your throat, sir; or would you rather have a bayonet in the belly?' I turned round quickly in the chair and looked up at the smiling face of my prisoner."

"Pretty good!" Mark said; "and I suppose the War must have produced dozens like it."

"Dozens of thousands," Ferris said; "I shouldn't call it much out of the ordinary as coincidences go; but when I was station sergeant at Wapping I ran up against a really striking one. The body of a man was washed up. It was naked and the

face disfigured by eels. On the chest were tattooed two hearts transfixated by an arrow, with Lil on one of the hearts and Bert on the other. Within twenty-four hours a woman came and identified the body as that of her husband who'd disappeared a week earlier. The body was about his build and colouring, but it was the tattooing by which she identified him. He was buried and she drew her insurance money; and three weeks later her husband turned up and she brought him to the station to show him off. He was certainly much about the same build as the drowned man (and you must remember that she'd probably never seen her husband naked; she'd be ashamed to, and so would he), but the astonishing thing was that he had transfixated hearts with Lil and Bert tattooed on his chest. What are the odds, I wonder, against that happening? Who'd believe it? It would hang a man ten times over. No, Mr. Passmore, always allow for coincidence; and allow the devil of a lot."

Mark smiled. "It's impossible to escape them. The telephone number of my flat in London was Marylebone 1013. Three days ago I succeeded in getting the telephone installed in *The White Cottage*. My number is 1013. But I imagine the reason for the frequency of coincidence is that there are so many people, and the range of possible happenings is so comparatively restricted, that the same things are bound to happen to thousands of different people at the same time and, theoretically, at the same place. Actually they happen to relatively few at the same place. It follows, then, that what really is astonishing about coincidence is not its frequency, but its comparative rarity."

About three hours after Mark had read himself to sleep that night (in Ambrose Bierce's *Can Such Things Be?*) he woke suddenly, felt sure something unusual had woken him, and lay very still listening. And then, quite clearly, he heard it: a scuffling, dragging noise outside his room. It stopped, and he wondered if he had really heard it. He did not want to get out of bed on a fool's errand, knowing from experience that if he were once thoroughly wakened it might take him a long while to get to sleep again. He lay listening, but there was no sound. He remembered Ferris's comment on the Golding story. It certainly wasn't a heavy supper in his case. Was

it, then, imagination? Probably. Or a vivid dream. Especially in view of the discussions of the previous day. He lay for a while drowsing and half-smiling at the thought of how vividly and convincingly the imagination worked in the small hours; and with that thought playing a misty hide-and-seek in his mind he fell asleep again.

But that morning Mrs. Paradock brought in his breakfast herself, and she said to him, "Excuse me, sir, but was you disturbed in the night?"

"Well, I did wake in the small hours and thought I heard a noise outside my bedroom door."

"Would it be a sort of dragging noise, sir?"

Mark nodded. "That's what it sounded like."

"I heard it too, sir," she said; "and this morning when I first got up there was a funny smell about the place."

"A funny smell? What sort of smell?"

"Well, sir, it's not easy to say what sort of smell. But it wasn't a nice one."

"Do you mean some animal had been misbehaving?"

"Well, no, sir; I wouldn't say that. I don't think it was that. It was the sort of nasty smell that might be anything; if you see what I mean."

"What about the windows?"

"All open top and bottom, sir, as you'd ordered."

"H'm. How much?"

"How much, sir?"

"Yes. How much open at the bottom?"

"Oh, about so much, sir," holding her hands nearly a foot apart.

"H'm. Quite enough for an animal to get in; and quite a sizable one."

"Yes, sir. But it wasn't no animal made that smell."

"But the dragging noise, Mrs. Paradock. That sounds like an animal."

"Well, it does, sir."

"What do you think, then?"

"It's a puzzler, sir, that's what it is; a fair licker."

Mark smiled. "For the time being, Mrs. Paradock," he said, "we'll have the windows open at the bottom *only* about so," holding his finger and thumb about two inches

apart. "That will rule out cats and dogs. And what's left? Rats?"

Mrs. Paradock looked dubious. "Well, sir, there *is* rats, o' course, but it'll be the first I've seen in Seathorpe. It might be a ferret. Lots o' the young fellows keeps ferrets."

"Well, we'll wait and see." As she turned away he said, "This omelette is delicious, Mrs. Paradock, and the mushrooms perfect."

Mrs. Paradock flushed with pleasure. "Thank you, sir," she said; "it's very kind of you. We all like to be appreciated, don't we, sir?"

Tom Palmer came that afternoon, and Mark, coming across him in the garden, stopped to talk to him. "There's some funny things happening in Seathorpe," Palmer said; and at Mark's look of enquiry he went on, "I was at Mr. Dauncey's this morning, and a funny thing'd happened to one of his dogs in the night. Or so it looked like. It was his red setter Bob. P'raps you know Mr. Dauncey's place?"

"No," Mark said; "and I don't know Mr. Dauncey very well. I've only met him at *The Club*."

"Ah! Well, he's all right. If you know how to take him. But about Bob. Bob has his kennel in the back garden just outside the verandah and on the concrete. Well, this morning there was a big wet mess all round the kennel and Bob was right off his feed. Wasn't hurt, but sort of exhausted; no life. And right off his peck. Funny. And there was your cucumber."

Mark smiled. "Oh, there's more than that. You heard about the vicar's pantry?"

"Well, I did hear something, but I don't take any notice o' bun-fight talk. Mostly backbiting and backscratching."

"And Mr. Fellowes's hearthrug?"

"I didn't hear nothing about that."

Mark told him, and he said, "Well, I don't know. If it hadn't been Mr. Fellowes it might 'a been something. But he's such a sprucer. Tell you any old yarn just to take a rise out of you. Told me once he'd seen a rat laying on its back and holding a hen's egg, and two other rats pulling it home by its tail. He's a proper sprucer."

"And there's Mrs. Duquesne's sofa."

"Haven't heard that neither." After Mark had told him he

said: "She's prussic acid, she is. Bet one o' the maids did it to spite her."

Mark then mentioned the queer noises that both he and the Goldings had heard at night, and said finally: "I think all these things seem to add up to something queer going on."

"Perhaps," Tom Palmer said, "and I won't say it don't look a bit rum. But I reckon things are only rum because you don't know the explanation. Look at the *Mary Celeste* mystery. Puzzled everybody for donkey's years. Still does. But it never puzzled me. I reckon she ran into rough weather and lost the skipper or he got laid out. And a day or two later, the weather getting worse and the ship making water, they sent someone down to see what she was making, and the chap, a youngster perhaps, being already half in a panic, made a mistake and came bolting up howling that she's going down, and they get the boat out and away they all go. But the boat's lost and there's the ship just as they left her, breakfast on the table and all the rest of it. That's how it was as I see it." He paused and looked at Mark, and said, "But there are things happen at sea you can't explain, and if I had the time I could tell you a rum un."

"Well, go on," Mark said, taking out his pouch; "fill your pipe and have a spell."

"It was like this," Palmer went on presently. "She was a three-masted tops'l schooner, the *Grace Darling*. Skipper, mate, and crew o' seven. I was sixteen at the time and the youngest aboard. We'd come from Labrador to Gib. and then to Alicante, where we'd moored at the wharf for unloading. and reckoned to be there a week. The skipper made me ship's watchman so's I shouldn't go ashore at night, being too young, he thought."

"Would that be in addition to the ordinary watch?"

Palmer laughed. "Cripes! there's no watch in port. Well, as I was saying, I was ship's watchman. But I wasn't the on'y one. Two carabaneros as they was called, sort of soldiers, come aboard every night as watch for the Customs. They came at eight and was supposed to stop till eight. Supposed to. As soon as they come aboard the crew mizzled off for the night, and a bit afterwards off went the mate and the skipper, all

dolled up and affable. 'Goo' night, Tommy,' they used to sing out: 'be good.'

"Well, about eleven the carabberos' wives 'd come along and tell their husbands to come on home; and away the blighters 'd go, after first squaring me with fruits and sweets their wives brought along. I didn't smoke nor drink. Not then.

"As soon as they'd gone off I made up the galley fire (one o' the ship's watchman's jobs), and then down I goes into the fo'c'sle for a read. I was a great reader. Read anything. Proper bookworm. No other 'obbies as you might say. Once you start liking beer and going after skirt bang goes reading. But in those days I read every minute I had spare.

"There was twelve bunks in the fo'c'sle. Bunks! You'd laugh. They was just shelves in tiers, six of 'em in two sets o' three each side o' the companion. Just shelves, and with a two-inch-high edge to stop you falling out. Most of the chaps rigged up little curtains to pull across 's soon as they was in. On'y way you could get any privacy, you see. And there was more'n one in a bunk sometimes. Women, I mean.

"Well, the top bunk opposite me belonged to a big, heavy Scowegian (Norwegian you'd say, but at sea all Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, and Finns are Scowegians)—a big, heavy Scowegian named Carl Hansen, as nice a fellow as you'd want to meet. Always clean and tidy as a new pin. No holes in his socks or clothes. Nice-tempered fellow. And a good drinker. An' could carry it. Now Carl had poshed his bunk up. There was a polished brass rail for his curtain; on'y he had two curtains, one at each end, and he used to pull them across both at the same time to the middle. He didn't used to jerk 'em, but very slow and easy. And they was nice blue stuff like satin.

"Well, as I said, soon as the carabberos 'd gone I stokes up the old galley fire and down I goes below for a good read.

"I'd been below about an hour having a grand read when I stops reading and looks up from my book and feel uneasy and sort of half afraid.

"Presently I goes on reading, but after a bit I stop again and listen and feel scared, and then after a bit I goes on reading again. This happens several times and I gets more

and more frightened. I'm getting scared to death. Fair creeps.

"And then, all of a sudden, I looks over up at Carl's bunk, with its two curtains drawn back, the last thing he always did afore going ashore. I watches it a long while. Can't take my eyes off it. Don't know why. Just sit there staring and scared stiff.

"And then the two curtains shake a bit. Gently. Hardly notice it. But they shake. And then they begin to move slowly along the rod towards the middle just as I'd seen 'em do a hundred times. I can't move. Can't holler. I sit there. I'm waiting for something. And then it comes. The loud creak I'd heard scores o' times when Carl turned over after drawing his curtains.

"I let out a howl like a dog, drops my book, and makes a blind rush for the companion, half falling over my locker. I'll bet you a five-pound note I was up on deck and out on that wharf quicker'n it'd ever been done since the old *Grace D.* was built.

"And there I stopped till the crew began to come back. First two came. Then two more. Then one. They went below, but I stopped on deck. I was waiting for the Scowegian. Presently the skipper and mate come along. And then the Scowegian came. I went up to him and I says, 'Do you remember how you left your bunk last night, Carl?'

"'Sure I do, Tommy,' he says.

"'You come along down,' I says, and followed him down.

"He looks at the curtains and he says, 'You been at my bunk, Tommy.'

"'No, I haven't Carl,' I said; 'that's why I asked you if you knew how you'd left it.' And then I told him, and he said, 'You're a good boy, Tommy; you don't drink and you don't smoke an' you don't go after women, an' I believe you; but if it'd been anyone else I wouldn't and I'd 'a bashed him for going to my bunk.'

"Now how d'you explain that? You can't. Try to and see. A mystery o' the sea." Palmer knocked out his pipe, put it in his waistcoat pocket, and took up the shafts of his barrow. As he moved away he said, half over his shoulder: "But if you on'y knew the explanation—why, nothing in it."

That Saturday's issue of *The Seathorpe Weekly Times* (September 4) had three leading articles, all written by the editor, Mervyn Clarke. The first was headed *Ireland for the Irish*, and demanded not only the immediate establishment of an Irish Republic, but the cession to the new republic of Northern Ireland, objecting Ulstermen to be 'resettled in Scotland and the ghettos of Liverpool, Manchester, Swansea, and London, where they belong.'

The second leader was headed *Blood Sports*, and began: 'Partridge shooting has begun. The English ruling class must be killing something, their fellow-men or fish, flesh, and fowl. All England's great men have been butchers, from Cromwell to Jorrocks.'

The third leader was headed *Tom Fools*, and was brief: "During the last week there has occurred in Seathorpe a concatenation of events which can leave no doubt in the minds of ordinary folk that that pestilential half-wit, the practical joker, is abroad in the land. The vicar, as well as Mr. Prosper Fellowes, Mr. Austin Dauncey, and Mrs. Duquesne, have all suffered at the hands of the same Tom Fool, for it seems clear that the 'jokes' are all the work of one man. Most of our readers will know of the events to which we refer, and we do not propose to pander to the imbecile vanity of the perpetrator by giving them any publicity in these pages. We trust that if there is a continuance of these simian antics the Police will take the matter up; and with that energy and skill which Seathorpe has come to expect from the local constabulary. We find it difficult to refrain from mentioning that the practical joker does not exist in the Irish Free State, Irishmen being adult and civilised. But we believe the pest is not altogether unknown in Northern Ireland."

## Chapter Eight

### SEATHORPE OPENS AN EYE

SEATHORPE sands were one of its chief attractions. Even at high tide there was quite a roomy carpet, and at low tide there was a fine expanse quite two hundred yards wide extending from below *The Royal Hotel* at the extreme north of the town to the harbour, a full mile beyond the most southerly bungalow. It is odd that this powder of the siliceous rocks of bygone ages should exercise so powerful a fascination upon the human race that children of all ages are enthralled by it and its possibilities as a medium for play, and are content to spend all their days of holiday lying upon it, delving into it, or moulding it into diverse shapes. This universal attraction is not without its drawbacks, for where a seaside resort is so fortunate as to possess an expanse of this substance the Commonalty swarm upon it in such numbers as to be obnoxious to the Quality, who, while retaining all the other rights in the country, have by some inexplicably careless oversight allowed themselves to be dispossessed of the foreshore rights. Happily at Seathorpe this loss was of no great moment, for trippers were almost unknown, and the indigenous plebeians, from their most tender age, knew their places and kept to them.

It is always dangerous and presumptuous to assume and theorise about the feelings of others; yet it is the commonest of all impertinences, and, taking shelter under this universal umbrella, it may be pardonable to assume that Coastguard Sidney Hooper was untouched and unmoved by the enchantment of the sand upon which he planted his slow feet on morning or evening patrol. Coastguard Hooper's mind and emotions were usually otherwise occupied. He was a man with a grievance. It was a grievance of long standing, and was largely responsible for his jaundiced view of life and human beings. He had never been appreciated at his true worth: that was the root of his dissatisfaction with life. He had spent twenty years in the Royal Navy without obtaining promotion, despite the fact that there was not a black mark

against him, and such was his ability and knowledge of naval matters (especially the legal rights of the lower deck) that he was invariably referred to by his messmates as arbiter in any discussion and his opinion and advice sought by those who had fallen foul of authority. Had he been made a petty officer it would have been something; a warrant officer would certainly not have been an undue recompense; and even the bestowal of commissioned rank could not possibly by the most envious have been ascribed to anything else but merit. But to have received no reward at all! Just nothing! Of course Stoker Sidney Hooper knew why. There was jealousy in high places of his ability and knowledge. And spite. Keep him down. And so he was kept down. And it had been the same in the Coastguard Service, which he had joined after his time had expired in the Royal Navy. He had been in the Coastguard Service twelve years and was still the same rank as on the day he entered. And in that time dozens of mealy-mouthed, spittle-licking toadies had been promoted Station Officers, District Officers, and Divisional Officers: why, hadn't his own Divisional Officer Bayley joined the Service after him and had been pushed up and up until he was now in charge of the Seathorpe Station, the dirty little sucker-up? He, Coastguard Sidney Hooper, had been passed over time and time again; through jealousy; through spite. And who did they have to come to when they were all at sea and wanted facts? Tell him that. You'd think they'd be ashamed. Not them. Of course, more fool him for giving them the use of his brains. But he'd always been like that; made that way. Of course they were grateful? Don't make him laugh!

Since his manifold grievances against life were his abiding companions, doubtless the like or similar thoughts occupied his attention at seven o'clock on the morning of Tuesday September the seventh as he made his way slowly back from Coveness to Seathorpe at the end of his night patrol. But his attention was not preoccupied to the detriment of his duty. As he drew abreast of *The Royal Hotel* he noticed some tracks in the sand. They led meanderingly towards the sea; and feeling, rather than observing, some peculiarity about them, he followed them. After some fifty yards they turned at right angles and continued southwards parallel to the sea

for about a hundred yards, and then turned again seawards and after some seventy yards or so were obliterated by the incoming tide.

Coastguard Hooper was bending down inspecting the tracks when Coastguard Iles, setting off on day patrol of the sands, came up and said: "Found something?"

"What d'you make of these?" Hooper said, indicating the tracks.

"Ah," Iles said; "tracks; not a seagull's, and they're not a shag's and they're not a crow's."

"They're not a bird's at all," Hooper said; "they're an animal's. Two parallel tracks; that's done by four feet, not two. And what bird's claw ever made a mark like that?"

"What you think, then? Dog?"

"Dog, my foot. Darned if I know. Might be a badger. Ever seen a badger's spoor?"

"Can't say I have."

"Can't say I have neither; but I've seen pictures." He straightened himself and yawned. "Don't see it's of any consequence, anyway. And am I blinking tired! So long, Tom."

"So long, Sid."

Coastguard Iles gave the matter no further thought; nor did Coastguard Hooper for twenty-four hours. And then, returning from patrol the following morning, there was another line of similar tracks. He examined them with interest, an interest lively enough to prompt him ten minutes later, when making his report to Divisional Officer Bayley, to say, "Queer lot of tracks, sir, running from just below *The Royal* in a zigzag southwards and ending up in the sea."

"Oh," said the D.O.; "what sort of tracks?"

"And there was the same sort of thing yesterday, sir."

"Yes. But what sort of tracks? A vehicle?"

"O no sir! a—er—er—quadruped."

"Some animal's tracks. And why do you attach any importance to them?"

"I don't know as I do, sir; but they were a bit queer."

"What d'you mean?"

"Well, sir, they weren't a dog's or cat's—"

"How d'you know?"

"They didn't look like them, sir."

"Have you ever seen a cat's footprints in the sand?"

"Well, I can't say I have, sir; but I've a pretty good idea how they'd look, and these tracks——"

"Pretty good ideas aren't much use, Hooper. Unless you've seen a thing with your own eyes your evidence isn't much use. I happen to have seen both cat's and dog's tracks in sand, and I should know. I wonder if it's worth while having a look at them." D.O. Bayley stroked his receding chin and regarded Coastguard Hooper obliquely down his long nose: "perhaps you'll take me along to them, Hooper."

"Tide'll be over them by now, sir; it was coming in fast."

"Faster than usual? How odd!"

Hooper flushed. "Well, they'll be covered by now, sir, 't any rate."

"Ah, well; I don't suppose they're of any importance; but if you should see any in the morning report to me at once and we will inspect them: the tide won't be so high to-morrow, although doubtless it will come in at its usual rate."

In *The Goat* that night Coastguard Hooper mentioned the tracks in a crowded bar and found himself launched upon a description in which imagination was a rather halting substitute for that exact and close observation which he had not brought to bear upon the phenomenon. He noticed the Larrikin Baronet appeared to be listening attentively and felt he was not making so good a show as his reputation for oracularity demanded; and he was infuriated when Butcher Scriven (unfortunately a big man) said derisively: "Talk sense, ol' man; if it warn't a bleddy horse or a moke or a cat or a dog or a badger, wha' the bleddy 'ell could it be in Norfolk?"

"There's an otter, Butch," a voice said.

"You're right. What about an otter, ol' man?"

"No, it warn't an otter, neither."

"Ever *seed* an otter's tracks?"

"Well, can't say I have, but——"

"Then 'ow the 'ell d'you know it warn't?" triumphantly, and looking round to admiring nods and grins of agreement.

"Because it warn't an animal at all."

"Warn't an animal at all! Why, bleddy 'ell! didn't you say it *war* an 'animal? A four-footed animal you said."

"I mean it warn't any animal that I've ever seen; not to judge by its tracks."

"But you haven't seen an otter's tracks."

"I don't need to see an otter's tracks to know what they're like any more'n I need to see an elephant's."

"Well, what *war* they like?"

"Told you, haven't I? Sort of like a deep scratched hole."

"Deep scratched 'ole! What, all on 'em?"

"That's what I said."

"What about a goat?"

"Might 'a been. But I doubt it."

"Ah, well," Butcher Scriven said genially, "that don't get us very fur. Have a pint with me, ol' man, and forgit the bleddy thing."

But that was now the last thing Coastguard Hooper could do. He discussed it with his wife before he set off on duty just before midnight. But his wife was tired, showed little interest, and her poorly hidden yawns exasperated him into snapping: "If I ever want to tell you something, it's yawn. yawn, yawn. I don't see you yawning when you're yapping hours on end over the fence with Mrs. Iles."

He thought about it a good deal during the lonely hours of his patrol, and it was therefore with considerable expectancy that he turned his footsteps Seathorpewards from Coveness just after dawn. He was a tall, gaunt man with a hatchet face and long legs. Coastguards on patrol, whether long or short legged, proceed at a uniform pace, and it is one that would not unduly fatigue a snail or a policeman. But upon this very warm and sunny morning Coastguard Hooper's pace conformed to no disciplined regulation: it was merely human: he hurried. And so, despite the freshness of the early morning and the comparatively mild warmth of the newly risen sun, he was hot by the time *The Royal Hotel's* chimneys hove in sight. Thin spirals of smoke rose perpendicularly from many of them, plain evidence that although the Quality were still asleep in the eighty-five bedrooms (not all, perhaps, in their rightful rooms), the Plebeians were busily astir below. What a pleasant dispensation of God is this ubiquitous and never-failing service of the common herd! It was a thought that did not probably occur to Coastguard Hooper; his mind

was otherwise employed. He had, in fact, barely noticed the smoking chimneys of *The Royal*; had even been completely blind to the indescribably beautiful scene which Nature was brushing athwart the eastern horizon as the sun climbed out of the sea and up the glowing wall of the sky. For Coastguard Hooper was looking straight ahead, his eyes fixed on the great expanse of drying sand in front of him. Would there be any fresh tracks this morning? There were. He caught sight of them a good furlong before he reached *The Royal*, and he broke into a trot that was not authorised in the Board of Trade Regulations.

There they were. The same sort of tracks as those of the two previous mornings, and taking roughly similar directions. Coastguard Hooper gave them no more than what is known as a cursory glance before accelerating the trot and setting off for the Coastguard Station to report to Divisional Officer Bayley.

The D.O. was up and in the office smoking an early pipe. "Ah, come in, Hooper," he said in his affected voice (which Coastguard Hooper could imitate so well that he convulsed Coastguards Iles, Baker, Soames, and Reed). "Anything to report?" And the D.O. fingered his weak chin and looked down his long nose.

"Yes, sir," Coastguard Hooper said breathlessly, wiping his sweating forehead with his handkerchief; "fresh tracks this morning, sir." He paused a moment before adding, by way of artistic adornment rather than truthfully, "more'n yesterday, sir."

"H'm. Well, there's no hurry," D.O. Bayley said blandly; "tide's only just turned. We'll go along presently. Better cool down. I just want to finish this B.R. one-five-oh. I shan't be long."

This was, Coastguard Hooper knew, deliberate and done a-purpose to spite him. The D.O. knew he was tired; knew he hadn't had a bite for over four hours and that a hot meal was waiting for him. He knew all this, the dirty little sucker-up, and he'd the ruddy nerve to say (and here Coastguard Hooper mentally imitated his superior's voice), 'Well, there's no hurry . . . better cool down . . . I shan't be long.' Blast him. For two pins . . .

But at last D.O. Bayley was ready, and together they strolled across the sands at the regulation pace of one hundred and seventy-six feet per minute to inspect the tracks. D.O. Bayley stooped down and peered at the tracks. Coastguard Hooper, at a proper distance, stooped down and peered at the tracks.

"H'm," D.O. Bayley said; "queer."

Coastguard Hooper cleared his throat, was about to spit, but thought better of it.

"What?" asked the D.O.

"I didn't say anything, sir."

"Oh. Well, Hooper, what's your opinion?"

"Don't know what to make of 'em, sir. Some animal or other, but darned if I know what."

"They might have been made by a cricket stump or a—a what d'you call that thing you plant potatoes with?"

"Cricket stump, sir!"

"Yes. What did you say you called it?"

"I call it a spud-peg, sir; but I don't reckon that's its right name."

"That's near enough. What do you think?"

"That they was made with a spud-peg, sir?"

"Or a cricket stump. Well?"

"Can't see it myself, sir."

"Well, they're holes, aren't they? The sort of holes a peg might make."

"Or a cricket stump, sir."

"Exactly. But I don't think so. Too many of them. And too regular a pattern. And too—er—scratchy. And, after all, who'd be such a dam' fool as to come out three mornings in succession and poke the sand about with a cricket stump?"

"Or a spud-peg, sir."

"Exactly." D.O. Bayley straightened himself and Coastguard Hooper followed suit. "It's queer, Hooper; damned queer," the D.O. said. "But I don't see we can do any more about it. And I suppose you want to get home to breakfast?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, well, cut along."

Cut along! cut along! Coming the high hat. Ecktually, Hooper, ecktually. The affected, toadying little sucker-up.

Seathorpe was beginning to wake from its immemorial doze to the fact that something seemed to be happening. The stories had got around, not always in their proper sequence, and much garbled; but certainly more than a hint was now abroad in the town of the affair of Mr. Passmore's cucumbers, of the vicar's pantry, of Mr. Fellowes's rug, of Mrs. Duquesne's sofa, of Mr. Dauncey's dog Bob, to say nothing of the Goldings' tale, to which Mrs. Paradock had contributed her corroborating item. And now there were these 'ere tracks.

There was quite a small crowd on the shore shortly after dawn the following morning. And not without a reward, for there again were the tracks. And this time, as Divisional Officer Bayley and Coastguard Hooper witnessed, considerably more than on the previous mornings. And although the tracks took roughly the same course as the others, they did not now stop short at the sea, as if the beast or whatever it was had taken to the water, but doubled back and, after many windings, ended at the narrow fringe of shingle just below *The Royal* and not thirty yards from where they had begun.

Conspicuous in the crowd was the plump little figure of Prosper Fellowes, with his sandy hair even more like a brush than usual and his protruding eyes behind the big horn-rimmed spectacles attentively examining the spoor. He had a camera, a sketch-book, a tape measure, and a pair of callipers; and for about half an hour he was exceedingly busy. He took about a dozen photographs from various angles and positions, more than a little impeded by small boys who wanted to get into the picture. He made as many sketches and he made the most careful and meticulous measurements.

Many questions were asked him; or rather the same question scores of times: "What d'you think of them, sir?" These he ignored as long as they were put to him by the vulgar; but when the Rev. Cyril Staines strolled up and put the same question he found his hearing and, after straightening up and brushing the sand off his knees and elbows, he said, with quite an *ex cathedra* air, "These tracks were not made by any bird or beast of which I have any knowledge." The verdict was delivered in no more than a conversational tone; but within thirty seconds of its enunciation it was all over the sands; and the vehicles of transmission, the human ear and

tongue, being the unreliable instruments they are, the more distant of those present received such incredibly garbled versions as: 'Mr. Fellowes says they're made by a bird or beast but he doesn't know what till he develops his photos'; and, 'Mr. Fellowes says it's no bird or beast, but something else he'll know as soon as he's worked out his measurements.'

The tracks were all that day one of the most, if not the most, discussed topics in Seathorpe. On the front, about eleven that morning, Superintendent Ferris ran across Divisional Officer Bayley and they stopped to chat. "What do you make of these tracks?" Ferris asked.

"You've not seen them?"

"No. Constable Dean, who was there from seven until after eight, did not think they were of sufficient consequence to make a report, and so I knew nothing about them till Inspector Blake made a chance remark. I went down to the sands at once, but the tide had obliterated most of them and trampling feet the rest. And it looked like deliberate trampling, so that the tracks were completely wiped out."

"Boys, I expect; little devils; there's no discipline or manners among children these days. What did I make of them? Well, I couldn't make anything of them, and I don't mind confessing it."

"You needn't. Apparently Fellowes is equally at a loss. I wish I'd seen them."

"Oh, I don't think they're of any importance."

"Perhaps not. But they might prove to be. And after three days of their appearance I've no record of what they look like. That could easily be made to seem very much like laxity. I thought I detected a certain derisive note in Mervyn Clarke's reference to the Police in *The Weekly Times*. And that was before these tracks began. I must make a point of getting down to the beach early to-morrow. How's the tide?"

"Low water at nine, so you'll have all the morning to examine them. But I don't think you'll get much out of them. Has Dauncey seen them, do you know?"

"I couldn't say. I think I'll drop in and see him."

"Is he likely to know if Fellowes doesn't?"

"Probably not. But of course he's a practical man; a professional; whereas Fellowes, for all his gifts and his books, is

really only an amateur. I think I'll run along to Dauncey's now. He's more likely to be in than later."

Mr. Austin Dauncey had not seen the tracks, having been over to Renham, where one of Mr. Beasley's cows had miscarried with a violent haemorrhage. "I'd intended to go and take a look at the things this morning," he said.

"Any theories?" Ferris asked.

"None that would be worth anything until I've seen the tracks; or at least a drawing or photograph."

"Fellowes has both."

"Yes, I know. I may give him a call this afternoon. But I'm a bit dubious. We're friendly enough in a way, but don't get on too well, especially if it comes to an argument. He's got the notion into his head (or perhaps someone told him) that I think he's something of a charlatan. Quite untrue, of course. I've the greatest admiration for his knowledge and his gifts."

"No ideas at all, then, at the moment?"

"Not about the tracks themselves. But I've been thinking it might not be a bad idea to have armed parties patrolling the sands to-night."

"Armed?"

"Well, yes; frankly I should suggest arms. But I'm not thinking of a police patrol. More of an informal affair such as a couple of parties recruited from members of *The Club*."

"It's worth thinking about. But perhaps it's a little early just yet for anything of that sort. Anyhow, officially. One doesn't want to look a fool. And I'm afraid the Force is peculiarly vulnerable to derision. Or perhaps I am."

The Rev. Cyril Staines took tea at the vicarage that afternoon, and mentioned that he had been on the sands to look at the tracks that morning.

"What were they like, Cyril?" Sybil asked, her eyes, her voice, her whole attitude worshipping.

"Astonishing thing is," Cyril said, talking to the air rather than directly to Sybil, whom he more and more disliked physically and despised mentally, "that although I saw them and looked at them closely I find them impossible to describe. They were deep impressions, almost as if—as if"—hesitating as he sought an analogy, "by George, yes! that's it; as if they had been made by an animal on stilts."

"On stilts, Cyril!" Mrs. Cunningham exclaims, with her squeezed-up little smile, "how excessively odd! But how could an animal get on to stilts? Now if there were a circus in the neighbourhood—"

Cyril laughed lightly but virilely. "O I don't mean actually! But the tracks gave that impression. I should say they were made by an animal with long, thin legs; an animal with hooves."

"It's certain it is an animal and not a bird?" the vicar said.

"O definitely. Obviously a quadruped. Fellowes was there taking photographs and making sketches and measurements, and I put the point to him about the hooves and suggested a goat, but he wouldn't have it. Dogmatic chap, Fellowes. Clever, of course; but is he an accepted authority?"

"He writes so beautifully about Nature," Sybil said.

"I should say," Cyril went on, ignoring this eulogy, "that Fellowes is a popular writer on nature subjects rather than a naturalist, a distinction with considerable difference. I should class him with Frederick Marr, C. G. D. Roberts, and Jack London, rather than with White, Jefferies, and Audubon."

"I thought his beaver book was generally considered as a contribution to natural history?" the vicar said.

Cyril smiled and shook his head. "The libraries catalogue it under *Books on Nature Subjects*, into which category any twopenny-ha'penny fellow's stuff goes; and not under *Natural History*, where you would find, for example, Darwin's *Origin*."

"Did Fellowes venture an opinion about the tracks?" asked the vicar.

"A purely negative one. He said he was quite sure they were made by no bird or beast known to him."

"That would rule out local fauna," the vicar said.

"Local indigenous fauna," Cyril said, emphasising the significant word.

The vicar screwed up his face slightly. "And what do you mean by that, Cyril? What other could there be?"

"Mortimer Hosegood's Zoo is not more than six miles from Seathorpe."

The vicar slowly caressed his long jaws and for a while said nothing. And then: "That is certainly an idea, Cyril; most

certainly. It would account for the unfamiliarity of the tracks. Have you any animal in your mind?"

"Nothing very definite. It's a long while since I've been to Hosegood's place. You know my views on zoos and similar barbarities. But a visit might repay one just now."

The vicar, perhaps designedly, supplied a fresh and more engrossing topic by saying, "I had an unexpected visitor this morning. Although, were I given to listening to tittle-tattle, perhaps not so unexpected."

"And who was that, dear?" his wife asked.

"Sir Jack Borlase. He asked me," pausing and looking round the table with the beaming smile he usually kept for extra-domiciliary use, "to put up the banns for his marriage to little Amy Watson."

"By George!" Cyril exclaimed.

"My dear!" Mrs. Cunningham said, and added, "and so it is true."

"O Daddy! how romantic!" Sybil said, and looked across to Cyril, hoping to find some response in his large blue eyes. She was a fraction of a second too late. Cyril *had* been looking at her; but in those fine eyes (which he used with such effect in the pulpit and at mothers' meetings), had they revealed his thoughts, she would have found no joy, for his thought had been how ugly she was and what a pretty little thing was Amy Watson.

Mrs. Heldar and Lesley were having tea with Mrs. Madder-son and Alison on the lawn at *Thetwins*, and for a while they discussed rather desultorily the prevailing topic.

"No one does the obvious thing," Alison said; "have the sands patrolled."

"There's the Coastguard," her mother said.

"I don't mean that sort of patrol, which ensures his being miles away most of the night. How can he be expected to know what goes on at Seathorpe? What is needed is three or four small parties to take up positions on the sands at dusk and remain till morning. They'd have torches, and if the creature came one or other of the parties would certainly see and hear it. They might even capture it."

Lesley uttered a faint exclamation of disgust and shivered.

"Why not?" Alison laughed.

"I really don't know," Lesley said; "but when you said capture it, it suddenly came over me that it might be some dreadfully uncanny, obscene creature. Something horrible and disgusting. And I couldn't help shivering."

"So much for the artistic imagination!" Alison laughed. "Thank God I'm earthy. I'd like nothing better than to join one of the parties. But of course it will turn out to be no more than some wandering billy-goat or young donkey or something else equally dull."

Her mother smiled. "But it couldn't have been a goat or a donkey, dear, that frightened the Goldings and Mr. Passmore."

"I didn't know he was frightened."

"Well, you know what I mean, my dear."

"Whatever it is," Alison went on, "it's a very good thing for the town. Seathorpe is waking up and noticing things for the first time since the Spanish Armada. By the by, has anyone noticed that it coincided with Mr. Passmore's coming to live here?"

"What is 'it'?" Lesley smiled.

"The mysterious events and the awakening of Seathorpe."

"My dear Alison!" Mrs. Heldar said, "you're not suggesting that Mr. Passmore has had anything to do with them?"

Alison smiled. "Well, you know he's a writer; a Fleet Street man; no doubt on the lookout for copy; a 'story' they call it, don't they? And Father worked in Fleet Street for some time, and you know he always says that if a story couldn't be found one was engineered and invented."

Her mother laughed. "I'm afraid that's one of *his* inventions. He didn't mean it to be taken seriously."

"He might have come here to find out about the Larrikin Baronet," Alison said; "and I believe now he did say something to Father about it."

"That reminds me," Mrs. Heldar said. "How I forgot it I can't imagine. It's really quite exciting."

"Mother should have been a writer of thrillers," Lesley said; "she's a master of suspense."

Her mother smiled. "It's only that I simply can't imagine how I came to forget it. Frank met Sir Jack Borlase in the Market Place just before luncheon and the baronet told him

confidentially that he'd just been to the vicar to have the banns put up for his marriage to Amy Watson."

Here was a topic worthy of their fullest attention, and in its discussion the rest of the meal and nearly an hour beyond was pleasantly occupied.

At *The Club* that evening the tracks were the main topic wherever members were gathered, in little groups at the bar, or in the billiards- and card-rooms. Madderson, Dr. Heldar, Mark, Prosper Fellowes, and Austin Dauncey found themselves together at one of the tables in the bar. Fellowes had with him some of his drawings and photographs, and after they had been passed round and scrutinised under the powerful lens which he also provided, Madderson said, "Might it not be some sea beast?"

"What?" asked Fellowes, who had not quite heard; and then, as Madderson repeated his remark, he said, "What sort of sea beast were you thinking about?"

"In view of the fact," Madderson said, "that the tracks have been confined to the sands, and after looking closely at your pictures, it occurred to me that it might be some sort of crab."

"Crabs don't come out of the sea and wander about the land," Fellowes said; "and in any case there are no crabs of that size in these latitudes. Further, crabs have ten legs, two of which have become claws; and this creature, whatever else it may be, is, I should say, a quadruped, although I would not perhaps entirely rule out the possibility of its being six-legged."

"But," Madderson said, "just as a Red Indian in walking so places his feet that but a single line of tracks is made, so I believe some quadrupeds leave what appears to be a single line, so closely are the spurs superimposed. Might not, then, an octopod leave no more than the track shown in your drawings? And I've an idea I'd heard of crabs emerging from the sea, climbing palm trees, and eating the coconuts."

Fellowes smiled. "Not from the sea. They are land crabs; big fellows. We've nothing comparable in these latitudes. They are, by the by, hermit crabs. The largest crab is the Japanese spider crab with a leg span of ten to as much as fifteen feet; a devil of a fellow to stumble into. Crabs, by the way, are decapods, not octopods. No, the superimposing of

the spoors would not be complete and would show clearly under a moderate lens. I think you may definitely rule out a creature with more than six legs; and if you are going to accept six legs, then you are asking me to accept an insect as large as a mastiff."

"Surely not as large as that!" Mark exclaimed.

"Insects, being invertebrates," Fellowes said, "are very light, and the track left by, say, a badger (a vertebrate) will make as deep an impression in sand or soil as an insect of six or seven times its size. An insect of that size is, of course, impossible. Its body wouldn't stand up to the atmospheric pressure. The largest insect of which we have any knowledge is the dragon-fly of the Silurian period (anything up to five hundred million or so years ago); it had a wing span of two feet and there is a fine fossil in the British Museum."

"I suppose the tracks weren't made by a badger?" Dr. Heldar asked.

"O no. Quite definitely not." He took out his notebook and a pencil and, after drawing for a moment or so, said, "That is a badger's spoor. No likeness at all. The tracks *could* just possibly have been made by a creature with six legs, something like a crab; but there are no such creatures either in the sea or out of it. Nor ever have been or can be."

"Can you say that definitely?" Madderson asked.

"Absolutely. Just as definitely as that there are no creatures with three legs; not on this planet. Or with two heads. It is as definite as that. Even if such a creature were possible, or lived in the sea, it couldn't emerge for long periods. Certainly not long enough to parade around Seathorpe; that is, if we are assuming that the other incidents that have occurred are also the work of this creature."

"But don't migrating eels emerge from rivers and cross ploughed fields and roads under the mating urge?" asked Dr. Heldar.

Fellowes nodded. "Yes. I'll grant you the eels. It's as much of a mystery as their whole life cycle. But, speaking generally, marine animals die quickly on land and land animals in the water: I mean submerged, of course. But don't misunderstand me. I do not say the other incidents that have occurred have any connection with these tracks. I am keeping an open

mind. At present I will venture the opinion that they have no connection. I cannot imagine a marine creature, and I am assuming it was a marine creature, able to remain so long out of its natural element as to pay a visit to Dauncey's place or to Mrs. Duquesne's."

"So it all boils down to what?" Madderson said.

"Just that I'm as completely fogged as anyone else," Fellowes replied, smiling.

"It boils down to something more than that," remarked Austin Dauncey, speaking for the first time. And as the others turned towards him he went on, "The obvious thing to do, to settle the matter, is to lie in wait for the creature. We might form three or four parties from *The Club*, say four, each of four or five men, and all armed with shotguns—"

"Armed with what!" Fellowes exclaimed, in so plainly hostile a tone that Dauncey flushed. "Shotguns," he repeated; "we don't know what we may be up against."

"Sixteen men all armed with guns against one poor devil of an animal," Fellowes said hotly; "I hope we'll do nothing of the sort. I agree about waiting in ambush, but not with guns. The last thing we want to do is to kill the creature."

"Or get killed ourselves!" laughed Mark: "sixteen men on the sands at night all armed with shotguns and all expecting to see something is a frightening thought. Count me out."

"And me," Madderson said. "Shotguns are dangerous enough in daylight. It was only last January poor young Sanderson was blinded." Turning to Mark: "Fine young chap, just down from Oxford. No, Dauncey; I'm all for trying to spot this beast, but armed parties at night don't get my vote."

Dauncey shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, well, as long as we're agreed on the main issue the means are a matter for arrangement. What do you suggest, Fellowes?"

"For the defensive, stout sticks should prove adequate. For the offensive, rope, torches, cameras, and flashlights. Four or five parties of three each should be ample. One party at, say, Tebb's cabin; one below *The Royal*; one by the huts; another by the lifeboat house; and perhaps a fifth by the halfway pond. What do you think?" looking round at the others. As all nodded agreement, he went on, "I take it we're all willing

to join one of the parties?" and as everyone again nodded, he said, "Then Dauncey and I will amble round, get recruits, and report back later."

"Oh, by the way," Dauncey said; "what about dogs?"

There was a moment's silence and then Fellowes said, "I don't think so. Not for a start, anyhow. If it's a job for a dog at all, it's a job for a trained cocker; but I'm not sure it is a job for a dog. I suggest we leave dogs out for to-night." And as no one demurred, he said, "Right; good; come along, Dauncey; we'll try the billiards-room first."

Six parties from *The Club* (twenty-two men in all) watched that night on the sands. The hours passed without incident and there were no tracks in the morning. News of *The Club's* activities on the beach was common knowledge by noon; and that night, when other parties from *The Club* took their turn of duty, they found several parties consisting of young fellows from the town. Again the night was without incident and daylight disclosed no tracks. On the third night, while there were four parties from *The Club*, the town supplied more than a score; and as there were many young women there, and the night was spent singing and dancing on the sands to the accompaniment of accordions, it was felt by *The Club* that with such scenes of revelry on the beaches nothing was likely to happen (nothing, that is, of interest or value to the earnest research worker in natural history); and as the night again brought no tracks it was decided to abandon further investigation, at least for the time being. And as those parties of young people who had made revel were also discontinued (owing to parental opposition and those other pressures which can be brought to bear when decorum is threatened), by the night of Saturday the beautiful sands of Seathorpe were, but for the plodding feet of Coastguard Iles, as desert as a wilderness. And as no tracks had appeared and no other incidents had occurred, interest in the affair faded. It faded the more rapidly, was, in fact, completely killed, because from the pulpit that Sunday morning the Rev. Xavier Cunningham published the banns of marriage between Patrick John Soames, bachelor of this parish, and Martha Raikes, spinster of this parish, for the second time of asking; and for the first time of asking, George Arthur Craigie, bachelor of this parish, and

Amelia Jane Mary Jellicoe, spinster of this parish; Benjamin Peek, widower of this parish, and Gertrude Clarissa Hope, spinster of this parish; and lastly (the vicar being an admirable showman) between Sir Jack Borlase, baronet, bachelor of this parish, and Amy Watson, spinster of this parish. And as the Rev. Xavier pronounced the solemn monition, "if any of you know cause or just impediment why these persons should not be severally joined together in holy matrimony ye are to declare it," he allowed his eyes to go slowly over the whole congregation in what was afterwards described by many of those present as a most significant manner and by others as 'very extraordinary, almost threatening.'

The forthcoming marriage of Sir Jack Borlase and boozy Bill Watson's pretty daughter was everywhere the chief topic of conversation, completely ousting the odd happenings of the past fortnight, so completely, indeed, that it might be said that they were forgotten.

Everywhere Sir Jack and Amy went they were the objects of tremendous interest and attention. Amy had left Rust's to escape the embarrassing influx of those who by the expenditure of a few pence on some trifles at the counters considered themselves licensed to stare long and boorishly at the pretty little girl sitting so demurely in the cashier's cage. Old Josiah Rust, the richest man in Seathorpe, did his best to persuade Amy to stay until her wedding, and was quite offended when she refused. He calculated moodily that her action would mean the loss of at least five pounds to Rust and Son, and thought she was an ungrateful and affected little chit. Embarrassed? Rot! Lot of silly hysterical affectation. And if she were, what was a bit of embarrassment against five pounds; one hundred shillings; one thousand two hundred reels of cotton!

The Larrikin Baronet's happiness was having a softening effect on him, an effect which was increased and quickened by the pleasant social intercourse in which, daily more and more, he was now sharing. He began to look younger, jollier; the wary defensive look in his eyes had given place to one of easy confidence, of assurance; the harsh lines about his mouth were smoothed out. He was often seen to smile; often heard to laugh. The pleasure he was now taking in the social life of

Seathorpe was responsible for much of this metamorphosis; but love was responsible for vastly more.

The vicar considered that he might as well ride in on a fair wind and tide (and it was all for the glory of God), and on the Thursday following the first calling of the banns Sir Jack and Amy were invited to tea at the vicarage. It was a very successful little social occasion. The vicar had hoped for five hundred pounds for the Church Restoration Fund. When Sir Jack offered five thousand the Rev. Xavier was astonished and stricken to momentary speechlessness. He would not have recovered his voice so quickly had he known that the Larrikin Baronet was construing his silence as disappointment, and was about to double the offer when his: "My dear Sir Jack! how can I thank you for so munificent a gift!" cut him short. But five thousand was magnificent. It would enable the work to be put in hand at once.

### *Chapter Nine*

#### SOME APPARITIONS AND A WEDDING

WHAT summer visitors came to Seathorpe were well-to-do and mostly put up at hotels. A few houses catered for the less affluent but still comfortably off holiday-makers. Trippers were not wanted; but indeed if what the tripper seeks is entertainment, what was there in Seathorpe to entertain him, still less her? unless, as students of human nature, they could find interest and amusement in contemplating the natives and the passing scene. For there were no beach shows, pier or pierrots, donkeys, or Punch and Judy. There were a few bathing huts, but these were rented by the Quality or the Moneyed. And there was but one small cinema.

There were, of course, people who came in for the day, or for two or three days, to see St. John's Church and the other show places of the town: the Dutch Houses; the Martello Tower; the Moothouse with stocks, whipping post, and ducking stool; and the tumuli. Or they came to look for amber

and cornelians along the beaches or to rub the famous brasses of the church, brasses which in their long years had known the busy fingers of thousands of these strange devotees. These curious visitors usually came by car and put up at *The Crown*, *The Swan*, or *The Royal*; but occasionally there would be among them those who had to practise husbandry even, alas, on holiday, and these (they were mostly the brass rubbers) arrived on pedal cycles and put up at one of the public-houses.

This preamble explains the presence at eleven o'clock p.m. on Monday September the twenty-seventh of a young man in the parlour behind the bar of *The Goat in Boots*. The young man was twenty-eight years of age, of middle height and build, and of undistinguished but pleasing appearance. His name was Stephen Brown. He dealt in the most valuable of all commodities on or in the earth or in the waters under the earth: the minds of children. That was why he was so poor. Had he merchandised in the bodies of women or manipulated stocks and shares or rigged international currencies he would have been rich and probably titled. He was single, this young schoolmaster, for who can afford a wife and family and a clean collar every other day on ninety shillings a week?

He was tired; but it was that agreeable tiredness that comes from prolonged physical exertion; and the old armchair in which he was leaning back delightfully ministered to his weariness. He had been hungry and thirsty, but the plateful of ham, beef, and salad and the pint of shandygaff had replaced the gnawing void by a soothed contentment. Lazily he took out pipe and pouch for a slow, sweet smoke before going to bed, when the door opened and Ben Murray came in. The bar had been closed half an hour and Ben had been tidying up, his wife Jess having gone to bed with one of her headaches.

Ben wiped his forehead on the back of his arm. "Phew! hot night," he said.

Mr. Stephen Brown nodded and proffered his pouch, which Ben took, and having filled his pipe lifted two tankards from their hooks and saying, "Have one with me, sir?" looked enquiringly at the young schoolmaster, who smiled and said: "Thank you: shandy, please."

Ben returned presently from the bar with the pint of shandy

and a pint of old and mild for himself, and for a while the young man who dealt in minds and the elderly man who dealt in thirsts sat smoking in an almost tranced silence of bodily contentment.

After a while Ben said: "First time you been to Seathorpe?"

Mr. Brown nodded. "I've come to see the church and I want to make some rubbings of the brasses, which I believe are famous."

"That they are," Ben said; "hundreds come here rubbing on 'em."

"It's an interesting hobby," the young schoolmaster said; "fascinating; it grows on you. I made my first rubbing when I was a boy of fifteen. It was in York Minster. I made it just because I happened to accompany my uncle, who wished to take rubbings of some of the magnificent brasses there. I merely did it out of imitation. I wasn't a bit interested. But before that holiday was over I *was* interested and had made scores of rubbings. And since then I've spent all my holidays on my bicycle quartering the country for fine brasses for my rubbings. And not only England, but Wales and Scotland and France and Belgium too. I am just back from three weeks in the south of France and stopped here on my way up to Grantham, where I live. There is no more delightful way of spending a holiday; no cheaper and no more healthful."

"I always thought it cost a lot o' money to go holiday-making on the Continent."

"Depends on how you go and where you stay. It doesn't on a bicycle and living, as I do, with the people of the villages. How much do you think my three weeks in the south of France has cost me, including everything, tobacco, wine (which is as cheap as beer is here): everything?"

"No idea, sir, really; but say a ten-poun' note."

"Half that: and then with a shilling or two change."

Ben expressed his astonishment, and after a pull or two at his pipe he said, "I lay you've had some rum adventures over there, sir."

Much gratified at this interest, Mr. Brown said modestly, "Well, I don't know. One or two odd little things perhaps. Do you believe in ghosts?"

"There's lots o' things I believe in I wouldn't care to swear to in a court o' law."

"Yes. Well, here's something which happened to me in a little French village in Normandy. I had been taking rubbings in the fine church at Mayenne and was making my way south to Laval, near where I intended to pass the night, but just as I reached the village of Martigné I punctured, and by the time I had mended it dusk was falling. I felt tired and hungry, and decided to stay there the night if I could find anyone to take me in. At the Post Office they told me that the schoolmaster, a Monsieur Albert Dupont, had a room and that perhaps he would give me supper and a bed, but that he was very particular. I called upon M. Dupont, who seemed a little dubious at first, and was consulting his wife with a glance when I told him I also was a schoolmaster. This seemed to settle any doubts they had and they made me most welcome, gave me an excellent supper, and after we had smoked a pipe or two together the old man showed me up to a pleasant little bedroom looking out over a meadow and a stream and told me it had been his son's.

"In the morning as I sat eating bread-and-butter and drinking my coffee before setting off, the old schoolmaster came in from the garden and asked me how I had slept. I told him very well indeed, and he then glanced at his wife and said, 'You weren't disturbed at all?' 'Well,' I said, smiling at his earnestness, 'there was a tapping noise on the window, but I guessed it was a piece of creeper or something similar and didn't allow it to disturb me. In fact, I slept like a top.'

"And did you look this morning to see if there were any creeper?"

"'Well, I did,' I said, 'and there wasn't any; but I've no doubt it was something else equally simple.'

"I had finished my breakfast by now, and he said, 'It is not good for the digestion to hurry immediately after a meal. Smoke a pipe with me and I will tell you a story.'

"I asked for nothing better, and presently he said: 'We had only one child, a son. When he was fifteen he found a fledgling magpie in the woods and, being fond of birds and beasts, he brought it home and tended it until it was strong enough to look after itself. Then he released it. But the bird had

grown fond of him and,' with a little smile, 'of the titbits it used to get from him, and often it would return and, coming to his window, tap on it until he opened it, when it was always sure of some little dainty. Most often it came soon after dawn, and its tap tap tap on his window would waken us in the next room long before it wakened him, for the young sleep soundly. Occasionally it would come in the early hours of the night, but this was rare, and he used to scold it then, but never withheld the dainty.

"And then my son had to go for his three years' service, and for some time after he was gone the magpie would come and tap upon his window, but when we opened it would never either enter or take any titbit from us, but flew away, and presently ceased to come, except very occasionally at long intervals and, very strangely, these visits frequently coincided with my son's coming home for leave.

"A few weeks before he had finished his three years' service the War broke out and he came home for a week's leave, and told us that he would then go with his regiment, the 118th Infantry, to the front. During that week the magpie came four or five times, and during the next month or so it paid many visits; and often, during those terrible days of August and September when the Boche was driving the French army and your little English army helter-skelter before it, we, my wife and I, would be wakened in the morning by its tap tap tap on Emile's window. That was our boy's name.

"And then one of the village boys killed the magpie with a stone from his catapult and we found it lying at the bottom of the garden; its head smashed and the stone quite near its body.

"Emile came on leave just after Christmas, and the morning before he left again he told us that he'd dreamt he'd heard Pierre (that was the name he'd given it) tapping at the window, and the tapping had seemed to go on after he had woken up. Of course we all laughed. Anything would serve for laughter that morning. It kept us from thinking. Emile did not come home again. He was killed a month later on the field of honour.

"But perhaps it was a week, perhaps it was a month, after

we had had the news, for we did not take count now how the time went, that as we lay awake one morning about dawn we heard a tap tap tap upon the window. It went on and on and on until I got up and peered out. There was nothing there and the tapping had ceased. It came again a few mornings later, and again and again during the next month or so. And then it ceased for several months, but at last returned. And so it has been ever since. Ever and again, perhaps a dozen times in a year, we will hear the tap tap tapping at the window, usually just after or before the dawn, but occasionally in the early hours of the night. Last night was the first time we had heard it this summer, and we wondered if you too had heard it. For, you see, we had begun to wonder if it were an hallucination, for things happen so when old people grieve without hope that the years will bring consolation. But we know now that it is no hallucination. What it is we do not know. It is enough for us to know that it comes. In its little way it brings Emile back to us.’’

The young schoolmaster paused to relight his pipe. “Rather a queer thing that, don’t you think?” he said.

“A licker,” Ben Murray said; “a fair licker. But what d’you think it was, now?”

The young schoolmaster smiled. “I haven’t,” he said, “the ghost of a notion.” He took a long pull at his shandygaff and then said, “If you’re interested in coincidences, here’s an odd one. But perhaps I’m keeping you up.”

Ben Murray smiled broadly. “I can put up with a lot o’ this sort o’ keeping up, sir,” he said; “you go ahead; nothing I like better than a good cuffer; I mean something what’s really happened. I’m no man for book-reading. Never was. You go on talking, sir. It’s better’n the pictures. ’N’ess I’m keeping you up.”

“I’m very comfy,” said the young schoolmaster, “and I like talking. I was going to tell you about a coincidence. I was in the south of France and I got some very fine rubbings at a village called St. Etienne. Etienne is French for Stephen, and my name is Stephen. But that’s not the coincidence. My name is Stephen Brown, and the parish priest there (they call them *cureés*) was Father Etienne Lebrun. Lebrun is French for Brown. So there we were: an English Stephen Brown meeting

a French Stephen Brown at the little village of St. Stephen. Odd, wasn't it?"

"A fair licker," commented Ben.

Mr. Stephen Brown nodded. "Father Lebrun thought so too, and was so delighted that he gave me a grand supper and a bed for the night and refused to allow me to pay a sou. 'Certainly not, my son,' he said, with a smile, 'it would not be robbing Peter to pay Paul, but robbing Peter to pay Peter.' And into the bargain he presented me with a little silver image of St. Christopher, and told me that he was the traveller's saint and would protect me wherever I went, even though I was not a Catholic."

Ben nodded. "I'm Church of England m'self, but I never could see any great harm in Roman Catholics, and Father Lampard here's as pleasant a gentleman as you'd wish to meet. And he likes his glass and his pipe. I never seen a ghost m'self nor heard one, but I don't reckon they'd scare me if I did."

"I had a scare once when I was in Brittany," the young schoolmaster said, "and it was an odd place to be scared in, for it was a church, and one would think that God's house would be the last place in the world to get scared in."

"I expect it's the graveyard outside does it," Ben said; "lots o' folk are afraid o' cemeteries after dark."

"I daresay it is. But cemeteries don't worry me. It was at a village called La Chapelle, and I'd got permission from the *curé* to take some rubbings. I only got there about seven in the evening, and so I was late in getting to work. And when I had to stop because of the darkness I found I'd been locked in. The *curé* had forgotten about me and the sexton didn't know I was there, and so locked up the church at the usual time.

"I banged on the door with my fists and rattled the big iron handle for some time, but no one came. I didn't like to make a real shindy. You know how you feel in church. And so I decided to make the best of it and sleep there.

"I made myself as comfortable as I could with pew cushions on the floor and was soon asleep. It seemed pitch dark when I suddenly woke and lay listening for something; I didn't know what; but I knew some noise had woken me. And it wasn't

really pitch dark. There was, in fact, a bit of moon outside and the stars as bright as they always are in early September. And then I heard the noise, and I couldn't place it. I don't so much mean its direction, although I wasn't sure about that, but the sort of noise it was. And then I heard it again and again and again, and could think of no other noise I had ever heard that was in the slightest degree like it.

"I began to feel scared. But worse than that, I began to feel that if I didn't keep a good hold of myself I was going to be very frightened indeed; terrified. And so when the noise came again, and it was now really almost continuous, I got up and tried to track it down. And at last I came to the stairs leading up to the belfry, and I knew the noise was coming from there; and suddenly I guessed what it was: bats. And so I went up to look. Bats. There were hundreds of them. I'd never imagined anything like it. I'd always thought 'bats in the belfry' just a humorous phrase. Certainly it had never occurred to me that a belfry would swarm with them. But this one did. Hundreds of them. They fluttered and beat and swerved all about me, brushing my hair, my face, my body, my hands I put up to protect my face; but never quite touching me. And all the time their wings went swish swish swis-s-s-sh! and it was this extraordinary noise that had awokened me.

"But it was not only in France that I have come upon odd things. Do you know Cornwall?"

Ben shook his head. "Never been out o' Norfolk in my life, and don't want to."

"Well, it's a queer place with queer people. Uncanny sort o' people. Not like English people at all. They don't seem to think like we do. And all the time you feel they're watching you without looking at you, and talking about you and—well, it sounds silly, but not wishing you any good. I don't mean they couldn't be kind and hospitable, or I wouldn't have this story to tell, but you couldn't feel quite comfortable with them. Or I never did."

"Well, I'd reached a little place on the south coast called Coverack. It was after dark. There was an inn there, but I was so short of money just then that I'd decided to sleep under a hedge. I always carried a groundsheet. And then it began to

rain; the slow, steady drizzle that you know is going to last for hours. And so, hoping to find something cheaper than the inn, I went scouting round the village, and at last found supper, bed, and a promise of breakfast, and all for half a crown, at a small farm kept by a Mr. Chenoweth. I think the old man (he was over ninety) wanted someone to talk to and smoke a pipe with, and would have taken me in for nothing if it hadn't been for his wife, who was what we call a needler in Lincoln. And that was rather odd because in Cornwall it is the men who are close-fisted and the women open-handed, in more ways than one. It's not what you would call a moral county."

"Ah," Ben commented, "Nature will out."

"And after I'd had supper the old man drew a huge jug of beer and we sat talking and smoking until nearly midnight. And a queer tale he told me, and about his own father too. It had happened when he was a boy of seven or eight. He was the youngest child, the others being grown up and left home, two girls and a boy; the girls married and the boy, after a quarrel with his father, had emigrated. The old man through drinking and whatnot let the farm go down until there wasn't a living on it; and then, to keep things going, he took to wrecking. There was a lot of wrecking done in Cornwall in those days, and the sort of things you'd hardly believe human beings would do: cracking the survivors over the head as they came swimming in; cutting rings off fingers and tearing earrings out of ears. Sometimes when the wreckers were many and there were a number of survivors there'd be a pitched battle in the breakers, but the wreckers always won, for they were armed and prepared. But old Chenoweth worked alone.

"One night he lured a ship on to the rocks. It was a rough, dark night. As he waited there for the dead to come riding in, or stuff from the breaking ship, he caught sight of someone swimming or drifting in, and made for the figure, chopper in hand. But the man avoided the blow and, with a curse, caught the wrecker round the legs and dragged him down, and then got his hands round his throat and drowned him.

"Ten minutes or so later there was a knock at the farmhouse door, at the very farmhouse where I sat listening to the story, and when old Mrs. Chenoweth went to the door, there,

dripping from the sea, stood her son, the boy who after quarrelling with his father had emigrated. It was the ship he was in which had just been wrecked, and he had unknowingly drowned his own father. Queer yarn that."

"A fair licker," commented Ben.

"And just the sort of horrible thing you'd expect to happen in Cornwall." The young schoolmaster smiled. "But, do you know," he went on, "I don't remember in all my travels seeing anything stranger than something I saw just as I was getting here to-night. Or thought I saw. It's just because there wasn't much light and I couldn't be sure, and that the thing is really so impossible, that I haven't said anything about it before. But it has just occurred to me that I might not be the only one who has seen, or thought he has seen, something of the same sort of thing."

"Well," Ben said, "there have been queer sort o' things happening hereabouts lately, but nawthing's been seen 's far as I know. What did you see?"

"Thought I saw. I couldn't really 'ave seen it. I'd just crossed the bridge and coming to a lane which looked like a short cut. I thought I'd take that rather than keep to the main road."

"That'd be Tibbies Lane. Tibbies is Norfolk for calves, and it was the lane they used to take the tibbies to the Common in the olden days."

"Yes. Well, I was riding very slowly along the lane, my light only just flickering; pity I'd not had my lamp seen to; I might have *known* then if I really had seen it. Suddenly there came out of the hedge, very shadowy and moving as quick as lightning, a sort of animal, I suppose; but—well, you'll laugh, but the thing, whatever it was, looked for all the world like a sack of flour hurrying across the lane."

"Gor!" Ben said, "sack o' flour. That's a rum 'un. Hadn't it got no lags?"

"Well, of course, it must have had legs, but it moved so quickly and the light was so bad that it was gone in a flash into the hedge at the other side. I got off. I admit I felt a bit scared. My heart was quite pumping. Yes, I was scared. I don't really know why. But I suppose it was just the extraordinary appearance of the thing. If I did see it. I'm not a bit

sure now. In fact, by the time I got here I was already beginning to doubt it. That's why I didn't mention it before. You say nobody else has seen anything strange about here?"

"Not as I know of. And if anything happens you get it in a public afore anywhere else. No; there hasn't been nawthin' seen at Seathorpe."

The young schoolmaster smiled. "I probably imagined it. Or it was a trick of the shadows and my flickering lamp. And, by jingo! it's nearly twelve. I do hope I haven't been keeping you up."

Ben drained his tankard. "That you harn't, sir. I'm fond of a cuffer; especially if it's one about something what really happened. Very good those cuffers o' yourn were. Fair lickers."

The young schoolmaster spent all the next morning and most of the afternoon in St. John's Church, and immediately he had finished his rubbings left for Oldburgh, where there were even finer brasses. He passed no word with anyone, so that his strange encounter in Tibbies Lane was known only to himself and Ben Murray, and, indeed, so preoccupied was he with his rubbings that the affair was for the time being quite forgotten. As for Ben Murray, the story made so little impression upon him that he forgot to mention it to his wife Jess; and he would probably never have remembered it at all but for the fact that three days later he overheard young Bertie Gates, who drove a van for Rust's, talking to his friend Charlie Deakin, who drove Butcher Scriven's van. It was early in the evening and the bar was nearly empty. The two young fellows were in there having a pint apiece before the regulars streamed in, because they had other and more enticing recreations awaiting their attention in the persons of Mabel Cubitt and Elsie Sears, whom they were courting.

"Didn't half give us a turn," were the words Ben caught first; and he gave an attentive ear to the rest of the story. "It was last night. We were in Ivy Lane," Bertie Gates was saying, "just by the back o' old Mowbray's shed. There wasn't much light, but it wasn't what you'd call dark. There was a sort of rustling noise in the hedge, which got louder and louder, and then Mabel let out a scream and clutched me and—well, blinking blimey, Charlie, believe it or not as ol' Ripley says,

there run out of the hedge and across the lane as quick as a weasel a sort of something like a sow; about as big, I mean; it wasn't a sow; wasn't that shape; more round and with a little head and longer legs, or so it looked like. Too dark to see what colour it was. Looked a'most black. And it disappeared like a rabbit down a hole—ph! quick as lightning, and—well, if it hadn't been that Mabel saw it too, I'd 'a thought I'd imagined the whole blinking thing."

"Struth!" Charlie Deakin said, "what d'you think it was?"

"Search me."

"Sure it wasn't a pig? Old Beamish's styes come down near Ivy Lane."

"It wasn't no blinking pig. I'll take my Bible on that."

"Think it was that what made all those tracks?"

"Well, I did think o' that and me and Mabel talked it over, but we didn't get nowhere much, for Mabel kept saying with a shiver, 'O don't talk about it; it fair gives me the creeps; I'm sure I'll dream about it. Let's talk o' something else.' And so we did, o' course, and that's that."

"Wonder what the 'ell it was."

"Search me. Well, I must push along now. Mab don't half create if I'm a minute late, but o' course if she's late . . . blinking blimey! But that's women all over. Well, so long, Charlie."

"So long, Bertie."

Charlie Deakin left the bar-parlour himself some ten minutes or so later, but by then several customers had come in, and when next Ben had leisure to look about him Charlie had gone.

Ben was not unduly impressed by the tale. He had not, in fact, caught it all clearly, and he was left with a rather hazy impression of what had happened and was inclined to put down the apparition as one of old Beamish's pigs. He certainly did connect it with the young schoolmaster's story; but his imagination was not stirred and it did not occupy his mind at all during the next day. Had it got noised in the town and been mentioned to him again he would doubtless have taken more notice of it; but apparently Mr. Bertie Gates, Mr. Charlie Deakin, Miss Mabel Cubitt, and Miss Elsie Sears had kept the story to themselves, an understandable self-restraint,

lovers not being anxious to advertise their favoured trysting-places.

But that very Friday evening an incident occurred which decidedly caused Ben to do a good deal of brain teasing, although even then he was not sufficiently stirred by it all to discuss it with his wife Jess, who was not in the bar at the time, as she was serving supper to a party of visitors in the sitting-room at the back of the bar-parlour.

It was twenty past ten, only ten minutes to closing time, and the bar-parlour was full. The door opened suddenly; more, in fact, than suddenly; it was thrust violently open, and Ted Marley, sexton and gravedigger of St. John's Church, pushed his way to the counter and said: "Give us a double rum, Ben."

"You look upset, Ted," Ben said, as he put down the glass in front of him; "nothing wrong, I hope."

Ted drained the glass and pushed it back over the counter. "Give us another one, Ben. Yes, I am upset. Tell you about it in a minute. I been frightened half out o' my wits, and I don't mind who hears me say it."

A hush had fallen on the bar, and those present crowded round the gravedigger, who, noticeably gratified by this unusual interest in himself, prolonged the suspense by taking out and filling his pipe. Before he could fumble for his matches three or four proffered lights testified to the success of his performance.

"It was like this," he began; "I'd meant to finish old Mrs. Denyer's grave 's evening 'fore dark, but there was so many odd jobs to do that it was arter ten before I could attend to it. I'd 'aff a mind to leave it till the morning, but once you start doing that you're all up at Harwich in no time, and so I got down to it. I'd on'y been digging about ten minutes or so, but I'd nearly finished, on'y just top o' my head above ground, when I hears a funny sort of scraping noise and I looks up, and I saw something in the starlight that fair froze my marrer. It was coming towards me over the graves. Don't ask me what it was 'cause I don't know. But I'll take my oath I never seen anything like it afore, and I hope t' Gawd I don't see anything like it again. Being where I was, I was sort o' looking up to it, and—well, I on'y wish I could draw and I'd show you

then what it was like. It had a big bulging body like a—like a blinking sack, on'y rounder, and a little 'ead so small it looked silly; couldn't see its eyes, but it seemed to have its mouth open. And legs. Gawd A'mighty! it seemed t'have a dozen on 'em. Long, skinny, hairy legs. But perhaps it was the way I was looking. It wasn't moving very fast, a'most crawling, but it was coming straight towards me, and it sort o' stank—can't tell you what it smelt like. I couldn't move for I don't know how long. Seconds on'y, perhaps. I was fair paralysed. And then it was on the edge of the grave, and I let out a yell and I suppose scared it, for it turned quick as a flash and was off like lightning, and me after it wi' my mattock. But Gawd A'mighty! I might 's well 've chased a bullet. That's just about 'ow it went off: like a shot out of a gun and was gone; no sight of it anywhere. And as I turned back towards the grave I suddenly began to tremble and thought I was going to be sick, and was terrified the bleddy thing might come back, and I drops the mattock and legs it for *The Goat*, and I'm not going back there to-night and old Mrs. Denyer'll have to wait."

"Did it leave any tracks?" someone asked.

"Tracks? Gawd A'mighty! I didn't stop to look. Anyone what's curious can go and have a dekko for himself. I'm not going back to-night."

"I was wondering if there was tracks whether they'd be the same as was left on the sands."

"Ay. They might and they mightn't," Ted Marley said. "I'll take a dekko first thing in the morning. They'll be there if it don't rain."

"I'll be surprised if it don't," Ben Murray said; "if that wasn't a wet sunset 's evening I never seen one."

And rain that night it did, enough to make the removal of the last six inches of soil from Mrs. Denyer's grave a messy business. And if there had been tracks (and already Ted Marley's daylight common sense was telling him perhaps he'd imagined it all) they had been obliterated.

Mr. Austin Dauncey abominated cars (or, as a veterinary surgeon and one of Norfolk's oldest families, affected to do so) and refused to own one, drive one, or, if he could avoid it, be driven in one. On his professional duties he generally used a

dogcart behind a fine roan; occasionally on his rounds, and at other times for exercise and pleasure, he rode a sorrel hunter.

The night following Ted Marley's scare in the churchyard Mr. Dauncey was returning in his dogcart to Seathorpe from Renham, where he had been paying a professional call. It was just after ten o'clock, and almost immediately after he had crossed the bridge and turned into the lower end of Ivy Lane his horse shied violently, the dogcart struck an obstacle so large that Dauncey was nearly flung out of the dogcart, which for a long moment hung perilously on the edge of overturning. When Dauncey pulled up and got down he found the roan shaking with terror and was some time in quieting it. He could see no signs of any obstruction, but retraced his steps looking for one and using his torch. All he found was a large puddle, and then, leading back from the puddle, a faint line of tracks just visible in the damp road, the evening having been showery.

He examined the tracks with his torch and they seemed to him remarkably similar to those which Fellowes had drawn and photographed on the sands. But there was no sign of the creature which had made them, and after shining his torch round rather perfunctorily he walked back to the dogcart. As he went he could not refrain from shooting uneasy glances behind him first over one shoulder and then over the other. He drove quickly away, and having reached his place handed over the dogcart to his stableman and strolled over to *The Club*, which was no more than five minutes away.

It wanted but a few minutes to the half-hour, when the bar was supposed to close; but the supposition was merely food for jesting. The police, of course, visited *The Club*, just as they visited *The Working Men's Club* in Tibbies Lane. But the visits were infrequent, and a message was invariably received from the traditional little bird before the police arrived. There was, then, so little reason for Mr. Dauncey to toss off two double whiskies with such almost breathless haste that Madderson, who was standing at the bar talking with Mark and Prosper Fellowes, made some chaffing remark to the veterinary surgeon, who grinned faintly and said, "I needed something with a kick in it," and told his story.

Prosper Fellowes, in one of his perverse moods, was inclined to pooh-pooh the affair, saying it was probably a rat.

"A rat be damned," Dauncey said; "Prince wouldn't shy at a rat, and the dogcart heeled over at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees. It was a miracle I wasn't shot out, and how it didn't go over the devil only knows. And there were the tracks. They weren't made by a rat. They were the same sort of tracks as were made in the sands."

"There's a lot of difference between sand and a macadamised surface," Fellowes said.

"I'm allowing for that. Give me credit for a little sense," Dauncey (or rather the whisky) snapped.

"Pity it's raining so fast now," Mark said; "or we might amble along and inspect the tracks. And the puddle. Especially the puddle."

"Why the puddle especially?" Dauncey said, nodding towards the steward, saying 'Same again, Sitwell,' and asking the others to join him.

"Don't ask me to give a reason," Mark said, with a smile, "but I'm interested in that puddle."

"His Fleet Street hunch tells him there's a story behind it," Madderson said banteringly.

Mark laughed. "I wouldn't go as far as that. But without any evidence to support me I wouldn't mind venturing that the significant feature in the affair is the puddle."

"Whereas, of course," rejoined Fellowes, with a characteristic touch of malice, "the significant feature is that Dauncey has been insisting for years that measures he has taken in conjunction with our esteemed M.O.H. Dr. Heldar and the two hirelings Joe Griffiths and Art Blowers have utterly exterminated all rats in and around Seathorpe."

Dauncey, who had now recovered his good humour, shrugged his shoulders, grinned, and said: "And the answer to that, my dear chap, is 'Rats'."

Dauncey was a garrulous fellow, and during the next few days his story spread, until, considerably augmented and coloured, it reached the ears of Ben Murray. There seems no reason why this story should have stirred Ben's imagination any more than those he had heard or overheard from the young schoolmaster or from Ted Marley or Bertie Gates. But

Ben's imagination was stirred and his interest so much aroused that he told the story of the Dauncey affair to Jess before they went to sleep that night.

Jess was by no means impressed by that isolated affair, and said so. "Can't see anything in *that*," she remarked in her pleasant Suffolk sing-song, for Jess came from Lowestoft.

"Maybe," Ben said, a little damped; "but what about all them other things?"

"What things?"

"Them tracks now."

"Pooh! lot o' fuss and bother 'bout nawthin'."

"Oh," on an aggrieved note; "and what about Ted Marley?"

"Well, what about him?"

"I told you."

"You never."

"Well, dammy, I meant to. Sure I didn't?"

"Of course I'm sure. And I'm sleepy. Leave it to the morning."

"Won't take a minute." And he told her.

She was impressed enough to say sleepily, "Well, it sounds rum, Ben"; and this encouraged her husband to relate the incidents of Bertie Gates and his girl Mabel, and of the young schoolmaster Mr. Stephen Brown, with a quite astonishing result, for Jess sat up in bed and said, "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Slipped out o' me mind."

"Mind! you haven't got a mind. It's a sieve. Don't you see how important they are?"

"Why, what's important about them?"

Jess made noises of exasperation. "Can't you see they're all of a piece? That they mean some horrible creature, some dangerous creature, is prowling about Seathorpe, and that something ought to be done about it?"

"Well, now you put it like that, perhaps you're right."

"Of course I'm right. Someone ought to go to the police."

"Meaning me."

"Well, why not?"

"No, Jess. I'm not going to the police. It's up to them. Start going to the police about something and they're in and out of your house at all hours. We don't want that."

"Well, we don't, Ben. But something ought to be done."

"How do you know it isn't? Ferris is a smart chap. Wouldn't mind betting he's got everything taped if we on'y knew."

"Well, it would be a nice change for Seathorpe," settling herself comfortably on her pillow, hitching the clothes up over her shoulders, and putting a plump arm round Ben, who was, after his sudden habit, already almost asleep.

Whether or not the police were doing anything about these occurrences, Jess talked about them; and as she had a wide circle of gossiping cronies, all of whom had other circles, there were in a short time very few people in Seathorpe who had not heard accounts of the various incidents; and as each fresh tongue passed on the tale or tales it added its own piece of special embroidery, so that the town was soon rich with dozens of garbled and exaggerated versions of each incident.

But Seathorpe was not perturbed, its imagination not touched. There was needed something more intimate, more human, to rouse its attention, to capture its interest, to take it by the heart. Happily, such an event was forthcoming. On Thursday the seventh of October, at eleven o'clock in the morning, Sir Jack Borlase and Miss Amy Watson were married in St. John's Church before a congregation which crowded out the church, packed the porch, swarmed about the graves, and tried vainly to peer through the stained-glass windows.

For the rest of that great day *Freyne Court* and its grounds were thrown open to the public, with Sir Jack and Lady Borlase as host and hostess. The Quality rather gagged at the catholic nature of the invitation which levelled all down with the blind impartiality of death; but as it had long decided to accept the Larrikin Baronet, no one, from the Earl and Countess of Frostenden downwards, kept away.

And certainly no one regretted coming. Sir Jack, bred as he might have been in a Sydney slum, had the right princely notions of entertainment. Powell's, the big caterers from Yarmouth, had arrived shortly after dawn with thirty vans and an army of labourers and waiters. It might have been the circuses of Lords George and John Sanger coming together to Seathorpe. And by noon, when the guests (all the inhabitants of Seathorpe and the countryside who were able to walk) began to stream into the grounds, ten large marquees and a

dozen smaller tents had converted the estate into a gigantic fair ground.

And there was no stinting of food or drink. Anyone who desired and had the physical capacity could have stuffed and swilled without a pause from noon till the rejoicings ended at ten o'clock with a firework display which was to set a pyrotechnic standard for generations.

Various announcements and speeches had to be made, and these were very wisely got through before six o'clock, when the first wavelets began to make their appearance of that vast tide of joyous and vociferous inebriety which later swept across the estate. Each speaker spoke from a raised platform on the west lawn, using a microphone, while amplifiers blared the words to the farthest corners of the estate into ears which for the most part managed quite comfortably not to listen, but whose owners none the less joined in the roars of applause.

Mayor Mr. Arthur Creed made the first speech (which the curious may find, with the others, in the files of *The Seathorpe Weekly Times*), and at the end he said, "I have the utmost pleasure and gratitude in announcing that to mark his wedding day our generous host, Sir Jack Borlase, is to build and endow a row of almshouses for the benefit solely of the indigent of our beautiful town."

Later, Mr. Rupert Tuttle, fishmonger, and one of the governors of the Cottage Hospital, made a speech, and then announced that to commemorate his wedding day Sir Jack Borlase was to pay for the building of a new wing to the Cottage Hospital and for the installation of an elaborate X-ray department.

The buzzings of admiration occasioned by this munificence had scarcely died away when the Rev. Xavier Cunningham took the platform, made a long speech (to whose rambling nature charity will refrain from ascribing a cause), and then announced: "It is with the utmost pleasure and the most heartfelt gratitude that I am able to tell you, my dear friends, that because of the magnificent gift of five thousand pounds from Sir Jack Borlase the work on the restoration of our very beautiful and famous church will be able to be put in hand at once."

It was very much later in the evening (dusk already having

fallen) that Mark and Lesley sat together under one of the immemorial elms of the estate and watched the multitudes surging across lawns and through the remoter glades and coppices in a riot of shouting and screaming and laughter that owed at least as much to a natural exuberance of spirits as it did to unaccustomed ebriety.

"I wonder," Lesley said, "if there is really any truth in the tag *in vino veritas*. Is all this the real people and all their ordinary normal respectable behaviour a mere cloak?"

"Only a half truth," Mark said, "but most of these are just screaming like kids at play. I doubt if one in a hundred is tight. Many of them have their children with them. It's just a grand hullabaloo like the Common jamboree the other week; like Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday. I like it. I get a kick out of thousands of human beings all letting themselves go. Massed laughter or cheering thrills me; it gets me every time. It gets right under my guard."

"It frightens me," Lesley said; "it always has done. I've always been afraid of crowds."

"That's one of the phobias of civilisation," Mark smiled; "I ought to know its scientific name, but I don't. There's claustrophobia, and agoraphobia, agoraphobia, lalophobia, taphophobia, and the Lord knows how many others. I haven't any. I'm afraid only of tangible things."

"I'm glad you're not one of those tiresome persons who don't know the meaning of fear," Lesley laughed. "I wonder if there really are any."

"Bound to be. It's impossible to think of a type of human being that doesn't exist."

"You don't mean physical, do you?"

"Of course; physical and mental."

"But it's easy to think of a type of human being that doesn't exist: a three-legged one, for example."

"That wouldn't be a human being."

"Isn't that dodging? Look at those horrid creatures that are supposed to have been seen in and about Seathorpe. If we're to believe the tales, they're not like any known creature."

"Semi-darkness, fright, and quite a small imagination, will build a nightmare out of nothing, or next to nothing."

"Then you don't believe in these creatures?"

"To be frank, I do. Most decidedly. And the more I think about them the more they puzzle me. But they all have one common adjunct, which seems to me of paramount importance and which perhaps holds their secret: they all have, or seem to have, some connection with water. Well, not all, but certainly many of them, especially if we assume their responsibility for those odd accidents with Prosper Fellowes's rug, with Mrs. Duquesne's sofa, in the vicar's pantry, and with Dauncey's dog Bob, and again in his collision with one of them in Ivy Lane, if that was what he collided with."

"Do you mean they come out of the sea?"

"I don't know." With a laugh, "I'm all at sea myself. But I'm convinced that water *is* a clue and might be followed up with advantage."

The next day, a Friday, Sir Jack and Lady Borlase left for a fortnight's honeymoon in London; and the following day's issue of *The Seathorpe Weekly Times*, besides containing a full report of the rejoicings at *Freyne Court*, had a first leader which recapitulated in Mervyn Clarke's best ironic vein the events which had been the talk of the town prior to the wedding, and ended monitorially: "This nocturnal animal (and there may be more than one) has so far not shown itself ferocious; but it would be the height of folly (a folly some of us may live bitterly to regret) to assume that the creature is not dangerous: *dangerous to human life.*"

## *Chapter Ten*

### SEATHORPE SHUTS ITS WINDOWS

EARLY in the following week Mark had one morning been for a walk along the shore to Coveness, returning by way of the winding inland lanes, which made the round walk about ten miles; and the weather being very hot he was not sorry when just after he had passed through Renham Dr. Heldar's car overtook him.

"You look hot," Heldar said, as soon as he had started up again.

Mark smiled. "You don't look exactly cool yourself."

Heldar shrugged. "That's exasperation; or frustration. There are five children down with diphtheria in Renham and the two youngest are going to die. I've been preaching immunisation for years. As M.O.H. I've had pamphlets printed and I've given lectures at the clinics here and in Renham; and on the principle of a prophet without honour I've got colleagues from other parts of Norfolk to come and talk to the mothers. I've stressed that it is painless, harmless, gives immunisation for at the best ten and at the worst five years, and costs nothing. And the vast majority of the children in Seathorpe and Renham have not been done. Ten children died in Renham last year and twelve in Seathorpe from diphtheria. Two are going to die in Renham before this week is out, and if we get anything of an epidemic perhaps four or five times as many; and we'll probably get cases in Seathorpe. It's not ignorance, but sheer crass, damnable inertia; can't be bothered. I'd like to put my whip across their backsides. It should be made compulsory and, unlike vaccination, there should be no conscience clause. I sometimes find it very difficult to love my fellow-man. But of course we see them at their worst and certainly at their most naked. We see men and women stripped bare of all make-belief: the fundamental and perhaps unalterable human being."

"I expect that's why doctors turned novelists make such a good job of it: Smollett, Conan Doyle, Brett Young, Somerset Maugham, Cronin, are a few names that occur to me off-hand."

Heldar nodded. "But they got out of medicine first, I suppose. I don't think they ran the two side by side."

"Well, they had to for a time. None of them was of independent means."

"For a time, yes; but not for long; they couldn't do it." With a faint smile, "Their novels would all have been gall and wormwood. I sometimes don't know whether to be merely amused or mildly irritated or sheerly infuriated with some of my patients. And the cheek of them: the really damnable, infernal cheek. Colossal. Quite incredible. I simply have to ask myself if it is what it seems to me or just blank ignorance, or stupidity, or lack of imagination, or callous indifference, or,

as I say, just infernal cheek. What do you think of this, for example? Just before midnight last night I'd already turned in and was dropping off after a hard day's work, real hard work, more than twelve hours of it, when there was a peremptory telephone call from old Mrs. Leveson, lives at *The Limes* at the back of Tibbies Lane, widow of Henry Leveson, the big ships' chandlers of Yarmouth, and stinking with money. A nasty old woman. Keeps a large staff of servants and makes their lives a misery. A cantankerous, capricious, rude old woman. Mrs. Duquesne is an angel in comparison." He made a faint grimace and added, "and between them they're worth well over five hundred a year to me.

"It was a maid who put through the call and she didn't know what was the matter, but it was very serious and I was to go at once. At once. And when I got there it was a lap-dog. And already dead. I lost my temper and told the old woman she should have sent for Dauncey, and in any case the wretched little beast was dead. But she didn't turn a hair. Said she wasn't going to have an animal doctor touching darling Boodles, who was, in fact, much more intelligent and sensitive than most human beings, and that I could charge a specialist's fee, although, smirking at me maliciously, 'You're only an L.R.C.P., Dr. Heldar.'

"She then insisted on telling me the story. It appeared that the lap-dog had been let out into the back garden at ten p.m., the usual time for its 'little business,' as she fatuously called it, but had not come in again, and by ten-thirty all the staff were searching for it (some who had to be up at five and had gone to bed early being routed out unmercifully). But it was not until about a quarter to twelve that it was found near the sun-dial and almost hidden by a lavender bush.

"It was a bloated little beast, obviously grossly overfed and under-exercised, and after a brief examination I told her it had died from heart failure and that there was probably a long-standing cardiac affection. She didn't believe me. Had the insolence to say: 'Rubbish; Boodles has been poisoned. I insist upon you making a post-mortem examination.' What can you do with people like that? So I brought back the body and made my post-mortem early this morning. The poor little

devil was choked up with fat. All its organs smothered. Naturally its heart had been groggy a long time." He smiled. "But that was not what killed it. It had been suffocated, as I guessed when I first saw it. I also guessed it had been done by one of the maids who had had to wait hand and foot, or top and tail rather, on the snuffling little beast. I sent a note round to her telling her that there was no trace of poison and that Boodles had died from heart failure and what did she want me to do with the body?

"She hadn't the decency to reply to my note or to thank me, but just sent along a maid with a basket to collect the remains, rather a gruesome load." He smiled grimly: "at one time I'd have consoled myself for the whole affair by the knowledge that it would put fifty pounds in my pocket, and why should I let myself be annoyed by the rudeness of ignorant old women? But I seem to have lost that philosophy. For one thing, fifty pounds doesn't mean very much to me these days, and for the rest I fear that far from mellowing with age I grow more irritable."

A few evenings later Mark was at *The Club* with Madderson and Dr. Heldar when Dauncey came in, and Heldar told him about Mrs. Leveson. Dauncey, amused, said: "Boodles was the perfect example of an old woman's lap-dog, wheezy, fat, and unhealthy. I hope you told her she'd murdered it. These old women make me sick. They ought not to be allowed to keep dogs. They spoil them for the same reason so many people spoil children: because spoiling is the line of least resistance; whereas if you're going to have discipline you've got first to discipline yourself, and people won't do it. And these fat old women murdering dogs all over the country have the damned cheek to pretend they're animal lovers. What they are is lazy, self-indulgent animal torturers; far worse than the swine who stuff geese till their livers go rotten, for geese are less intelligent than dogs and suffer less. I hope you gave the old cat a dressing down."

Heldar laughed. "I certainly didn't tell her the truth, which was that Boodles had been suffocated. I assumed it had been done by one of the girls who had to dance attendance on the snuffling little brute; and being in complete sympathy with her I said nothing."

"Suffocated, eh?" Dauncey said, on a note of such interest that Heldar looked at him with some surprise.

"Odd," Dauncey said, "very odd. In the last twenty-four hours I've had three cases of cats being found suffocated: Mrs. Cowdray's, Mrs. Weekes's, and Miss Raper's; and the body of Miss Raper's Rex was saturated."

Mark at this uttered an exclamation, and Dauncey, catching his glance, said, "And what do you think it was saturated with?"

Heldar said: "No idea; but as we appear to be approaching the realms of the fantastic, shall we say whisky?"

Dauncey laughed. "Well, no; but perhaps as fantastic: a solution of potassium carbonate plus some hydrochloric acid."

"Good Lord!" Madderson said; "that's dam' rum, isn't it?"

Dauncey looked from one to the other, faintly smiling. "Rum it is," he said; "any suggestions?"

"Isn't potassium carbonate the chemical name of pearl ash?" Mark said; and at Dauncey's nod went on: "What is pearl ash used for these days? That might be a pointer."

"Cleaning paint and paintwork," Madderson said; "I don't know of any other use."

"It's the base for some hair washes," Dr. Heldar said; "or used to be."

"That doesn't seem to get us very far——" Mark was saying, when Madderson interrupted: "Doesn't Miss Raper's garden adjoin Sawyer's back premises? Isn't that a pointer? I don't mean that the old man did anything deliberately, but his shop's an untidy mess for a chemist's, and I imagine he's always chucking stuff about in his back."

Dauncey shook his head. "Very ingenious, but won't fit the facts. Rex was lying in a pool of potassium carbonate on the concrete by the balcony of the house and quite forty yards from Sawyer's premises. As I see it the stuff must have been poured over the cat's corpse as it lay on the concrete. A daft, a quite inexplicable thing to do, but," with a shrug of his shoulders, "isn't that of a piece with a lot of things that have happened recently?"

"Isn't there a story behind it?" Madderson said, looking at Mark, with a grin: "there ought to be."

"There is," Mark said; "there's no doubt about that at all.

And if we knew definitely where it began we might be able to run it down."

"I'd prefer to know where it's going to end," Heldar said. "I don't quite like the look of things."

"I'm wondering if Hosegood's Zoo might not provide the key," Mark said; "but I imagine that's occurred to everyone."

"It doesn't fit half the facts," Dauncey said.

"The trouble about the facts seems to be," Heldar said, "that if you take them all they just don't make sense; they add up to sheer lunacy."

Mark demurred. "It's obvious we don't know all the facts," he said; "all the facts about anything must logically make sense or the law and order of the universe would dissolve into chaos. When we do know all the facts they'll add up either to something quite commonplace or to something very astonishing, but certainly not to lunacy."

Several nights later, just after ten-thirty, Dr. Heldar, having finished his supper, was settling down with his pipe and a book. As he finished lighting his pipe he stretched out his legs and said, "This is good. By George! I'm tired! I've had a tiring day." He opened his book and slowly turned the pages. "Hope I'll be able to finish this without being disturbed. I've been nearly a month reading it, and I've given every spare moment to it. And some fellow was writing in *The Times* the other day that doctors don't keep abreast with what is being written about medicine and surgery. Allowing for sleep, meals, and a very occasional round of golf, I've not had a single leisure moment for reading in the last three weeks."

"Well, dear, you've an hour or so now," his wife said. "What dreadful print! I'm sure thousands of young people have their sight ruined by such small print. It ought not to be allowed."

"My sight's already ruined," her husband said; "and I don't imagine any children will read this."

"What is it?" Lesley said.

"*Ten Years in a Cockpit*. It's the diary of naval surgeon in the decade 1755 to '65; which included the Seven Years' War. It was largely a naval war and a bloody one." He drew slowly at his pipe. "To read the papers and to listen to people talk-

ing, quite intelligent people, one would get the impression that medically and surgically speaking things are not so vastly much better to-day than they were two hundred years ago. The truth, of course, is that no more than a hundred years ago cockpits afloat and operating theatres ashore were butchers' shambles where ignorant men without anæsthetics and without antiseptics slashed and hacked and sawed poor devils held down or tied down who were given gags to bite on and whose screams were stifled with towels. Ship's surgeons at times worked ankle-deep in blood. Fifty per cent. of arm and leg amputations died; all stomach and abdominal wounds were fatal. And because some supersensitive, self-indulgent, over-civilised old man or woman suffers some mild discomfort during a major operation (necessitated by their gluttony) a howl goes up that modern surgeons and surgical practice—O blast that bell! If that's a call—all right, Mary; I'm coming."

He returned to the room a few moments later. "Young Mrs. Jenkins's baby has died suddenly. Extraordinary. As healthy a babe as I've seen for a long while. It was young Jenkins himself ringing up from a call-box. He seemed a bit hysterical. I told him I'd come round at once."

It was well after eleven before Dr. Heldar got back, and he poured himself out a whisky-and-soda and lit his pipe before he said anything. And then bluntly, almost with the effect of blurting it out, he said, "The baby had been suffocated. How is a complete mystery. It sleeps in their bedroom in its cot. Mrs. Jenkins had given it its last feed at ten o'clock and then carried it in to the cot, which is about four feet from the side of their bed and against a wall near but well to the side of the window. The window is always kept wide open top and bottom day and night, except when the weather is too bad.

"They both told me they heard nothing, and the bedroom is next to their sitting-room; and that when they went to bed about half-past ten, which was their usual time, Mrs. Jenkins went over to the cot to see that the baby was all right and found it dead. The shock was quite prostrating and she badly needed my attention, which I'm afraid wasn't worth very much. I left a sedative with young Jenkins and told him to give it to her if she did not get to sleep fairly soon. But of

course she won't. I doubt even if she'll sleep with the sedative."

"The poor young thing!" Mrs. Heldar exclaimed; "but whatever could have suffocated the poor mite?"

"That's for the police to find out. I called in at the Station on my way back. There'll have to be an inquest, of course. But I think it's pretty clear."

"Why, Father," Lesley said; "you don't mean——"

"I mean that whatever suffocated Mrs. Leveson's poodle and Miss Raper's cat Rex, to say nothing of the others, probably suffocated the Jenkins's baby."

"You don't think a cat got in through the window?" Mrs. Heldar asked; "more than one infant has been suffocated by a cat lying on its face."

Her husband shook his head. "I might think so if this were an isolated case; but it seems to me this is just one more instance added to the others. And Mrs. Jenkins mentioned a queer smell she noticed as she entered the room. Not a cat smell. She couldn't say what it was, except that it was faint and strange and very unpleasant. She only remembered it afterwards. Her husband hadn't noticed it, but he's a heavy smoker and admits he has a poor sense of smell. This business is getting devilish serious."

It was a sentiment in which Seathorpe entirely concurred. The tragic death of this young married couple's first baby stirred the town as nothing had done for many years. It was stirred to sympathy, to compassion; and even more to fear. Seathorpe began to be seriously alarmed, and the first evidence of that perturbation was the shutting of windows. The more nervous kept them shut day and night, while even the most courageous kept them open no more than a couple of inches at the top and bottom.

The inquest was held on the Tuesday. The coroner listened to the evidence of the young father and mother and then called Dr. Heldar, who had conducted a post-mortem that morning. Dr. Heldar said the baby was well nourished, that every organ in the body was perfectly healthy and showed nothing abnormal; and that death had been caused by suffocation, but he could not suggest by what means. There were no signs of any violence having been used. Superintendent

Ferris next gave evidence to the effect that he had had carried out every line of investigation which seemed likely to reveal the truth, but with no result. He said that the police were continuing their investigations. The Coroner, after expressing his sympathy with Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins, on neither of whom, he said emphatically, any suspicion had rested or could rest, returned a verdict of 'Death by misadventure, there being no evidence to show how the baby came by its death.' He then said that there had been several incidents recently in the town which were causing people uneasiness, and that he did not think he was exaggerating when he said that the death of this infant had increased that uneasiness to the point of alarm; of very grave and very general alarm; and that he was glad to hear the police were to continue their investigations.

The following Saturday morning *The Seathorpe Weekly Times* contained a full report of the inquest and a first leader which ended: "It is with no feelings of satisfaction, but rather with profound sorrow and deep compassion for the stricken parents, that we have seen our forecast come true; our worst fears realised. With the fullest sense of responsibility and weighing our words with the utmost care, we now ask: must we wait until tragedy is added to tragedy before something is done?" Few readers of the paper failed to notice that, despite the editor's very good relationship with Mortimer Hosegood, he had admitted to his correspondence columns several letters which hinted pretty plainly that there was no need to look any further than the millionaire's Zoo for the source of all that had happened during the past weeks.

Mark that same morning was carrying a copy of the local paper when he met Superintendent Ferris, who chaffed him on his taste in reading. They happened to be going in the same direction, and presently Mark said, "Have you read it?" and being told No, went on, "There are several letters suggesting that Hosegood's Zoo is the cause of the trouble." He smiled and added, "There's also a red-hot leader demanding to know when something is going to be done."

"Meaning by me," Ferris said.

"Not a bad guess."

"It's amazing how everyone can teach the police their business. As a matter of fact, Inspector Blake and I went over

to see Hosegood last Monday, the day after Baby Jenkins's death. Hosegood wasn't there. His secretary, a good-looking, arrogant young man in the twenties, told us he was in London and asked what he could do for us, adding, with what I found an irritating smile, that he had full authority to act for the millionaire.

"He did not know, or pretended not to know, that anything had been happening at Seathorpe; and after I had told him of the events of the past month, to which he listened with an affected air of bored attention, I said: 'What I want to know, Mr.——'

"'Carruthers,' he prompted me.

"Mr. Carruthers, is whether any animals have escaped from the Zoo during the past six weeks?"

"'No,' he said, shaking his head very emphatically.

"'No creatures of any sort?' Blake put in; 'none of the Zoo's inhabitants at all?'

"'Not so much as a spider,' Carruthers said; 'although possibly the last of the fleas brought here by the mob on August Bank Holiday may have emerged during the period you mention.'

"There didn't seem anything more to be obtained from Mr. Carruthers, but before we left Blake asked for Hosegood's address in London, and, after some hesitation on the secretary's part, got it: The Cenacle Club, St. James's, London, S.W. 1.

"As we drove back I asked Blake if he was proposing that I should write to Hosegood, but he said no; what he wanted to do was to go up to Town and see Hosegood, and he asked my permission to go. 'I watched young Carruthers closely,' he said, 'all the time we were talking to him, and I believe he was lying.'

"I wasn't at all keen on his proposal. It could land me in an awkward corner if Carruthers had been telling the truth and Hosegood wanted to make things unpleasant; but I allowed Blake to talk me over. I had certain doubts myself about Carruthers's veracity.

"Blake caught the first train up on Tuesday morning and was back on the last, a feat even our most captious critics could hardly find fault with, especially as the four hours he

had in Town included an interview with Hosegood and a call at Scotland Yard on another matter."

Ferris grinned. "I won't pretend that the interview with Hosegood was a protracted one. Few interviews can, in fact, have been shorter. Hosegood listened to Blake; asked if he'd been to the Zoo, and then asked what Mr. Carruthers had said. Being told, he snapped: 'Then what the devil are you bothering me for? Are you suggesting that Mr. Carruthers is lying?'

"But Blake stood up to him. 'I'm suggesting that he may have forgotten,' he said diplomatically.

"He doesn't forget or he wouldn't be my secretary. And now perhaps you'll be good enough to go. And it would be as well if in future you kept in mind that when I authorise anyone to represent me there is no need to refer to me.'

"But again Blake stood up to him. 'People frequently claim an authority they don't possess,' he said. 'If, of course, you notified us at any time you proposed—'

"To be away," Hosegood interrupted.

"Precisely," Blake said; falling, I'm afraid, up to his neck in it.

"And since when have I been a ticket-of-leave man?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Blake said, trying to save an impossible situation; 'I'm afraid I put it rather clumsily—'

"Extremely clumsily," Hosegood said; and then, deliberately turning away, 'I wish you good day, sir.' And that was that. What do you think?"

"Having been present at neither interview," Mark said, "it's difficult to judge; and I doubt if my opinion is worth anything. But for what it is worth I imagine that both Carruthers and Hosegood were telling the truth. Hosegood is obviously an awkward customer; awkward for the sake of being awkward; just perversity. And Carruthers is the good-looking, conceited cub. The Cyril Staines sort, I imagine."

Ferris laughed. "A good guess; they might be from the same dam with a different sire."

"But," Mark went on, "it didn't strike me as I listened to your account that they were lying."

Ferris nodded. "I'm inclined to agree with you," he said. And added: "and where do we go from now? Any ideas?"

hypotheses? It doesn't matter how fantastic. Wasn't it Wilde who said: 'Too fantastic is too true'?"

"I doubt if he meant it quite like that," Mark said; "but haven't you any theories?"

"Not the ghost of one. At the moment I'm as completely balked as a hound at a waterfall. I was hoping you might have something."

Mark shook his head. "Not the foggiest. I'm simply stumped. It's infuriating to think that perhaps one single missing link would make the whole thing clear as daylight. I thought we'd found it the other day. You knew about Miss Raper's cat?"

Ferris nodded.

"And that it was saturated with a solution of potassium carbonate and a small amount of hydrochloric acid?"

Again Ferris nodded, and Mark went on: "I certainly thought we'd got something there and took it home with me and chewed it over for hours, and took it to bed with me. I thought that pearl ash might be a pointer. But no. The result of all my brain dredging and battering was nothing. Looks as if you'll have to wait till the missing link turns up."

"Meanwhile," Ferris said, "it's to be hoped nothing else occurs or we shall have the town panicking; and then all sorts of hysterical donkeys will start doing and demanding all sorts of dam' foolishness."

When Madderson dropped in at *The White Cottage* that evening to borrow Southey's *Letters* Mark referred to his talk with Ferris, and after describing the Superintendent's interview with Carruthers and Inspector Blake's call on Hosegood, he said, "Ferris admits he's now up against a blank wall."

"It's certainly a licker," Madderson said, "to borrow Ben Murray's favourite comment. As the politicians are so fond of saying, every avenue seems to have been explored, although I've always thought avenues were hardly the sort of things one explored."

"There's Mr. Essenhigh," Mark remarked; "is he a possibility?"

"Luther Essenhigh, our tame musical genius," Madderson smiled; "he doesn't strike me as being exactly—er—relevant. Why not his man Jackson?"

Mark laughed. "I was considering him simply as an eccentric. A chap who lives almost a hermit's life and produces magnificent unearthly music (isn't that what Alison called it?) is, to a romantic novelist, *ipso facto* capable of anything."

"No one would call Prosper Fellowes quite a normal type," Madderson said; "are you going to add him to your list of suspects? After all, he's a naturalist. And there's Dauncey, of course; he always handling the brute creation. The fact that they've both been sufferers may be the maniac's cunning." He grinned. "Would you describe yourself as quite normal? Or, for that matter, am I? Seathorpe thinks I've a screw loose. By the way, how is the novel going?"

"It's gone," Mark said; "up in smoke; weeks ago. I got fed up with the damned thing. It was rank, anyway. I've put aside the idea of novels for a time and have begun on my biography of Robert Bloomfield. I want to run over to Honington, where he was born, and take a look round; see the cottage he was born in and so forth. I wonder if you'd care to come along and make some drawings I could use; I prefer them to photographs. Any day convenient for you. It's a round trip of no more than a hundred and twenty miles."

"Delighted," Madderson said; "but I'm really only a humble draughtsman, despite all the bunce I've made."

"Rot," Mark said; "I've seen some of your etchings and water-colours, and if you'll do anything half as good for me I'll be eternally grateful."

"That's what I call handsome," Madderson smiled. "Fix your own day. All days are the same to me."

"I wonder if Heldar would join us," Mark said; "it would do him good to get away from his wretched patients for a day."

"That's just what he won't do," Madderson said. "By the by, he told me yesterday that if this shut-window craze continues there'll be a first-class epidemic of influenza. He said that in many of the villages in the West Country as soon as the cold weather starts everybody clamps down the windows day and night, and within a few weeks influenza makes its appearance and remains on and off during the whole winter. He said the thing is so recurrent and regular that it can be forecast as a known cycle of events. He also gave me a more cheerful item of news: the Larrikin Baronet and his bride are

due back to-morrow. Wonder how they've weathered the ordeal of the honeymoon."

"Is it as bad as all that?" Mark laughed.

"It can be. You ought to talk to Heldar. He has quite a small repertory of macabre stories concerning this popular institution. He declares, a little hyperbolically, I imagine, that half the marriages that are shipwrecked began to head for that disaster on the honeymoon. You get a couple of young people who really know nothing about it and have a pathetic belief that Nature knows best capering gaily into an experience which should be prepared for with at least as much care as one prepares for an examination. As if its importance did not fully warrant that care!"

"I think my generation have a little more *savoir faire* in the matter than yours had," Mark said, smiling.

"Precisely!" Madderson rejoined. "You *think*. We thought too, my boy. But we found our thinking had left us with a lot of gaps. How does the tag go: *si la jeunesse savait?*"

Mark laughed. "I won't cap it with its complement," he said; "at least, not until after we've been to Honington."

## *Chapter Eleven'*

### THE KILLER

ON the following Wednesday morning Mark called round at Ferris's house to return Brend's *Handbook of Medical Jurisprudence and Toxicology* which he had borrowed in connection with an article he was writing for his old paper, *The Morning Courier*. He found Ferris eating his breakfast, and congratulated him on being able to have a leisurely breakfast at ten-thirty.

"Like most things about the Force," Ferris said, "it's not what it seems. I breakfast at eight, when I've time for breakfast at all. At one minute to that hour this morning I was about to sit down to breakfast when a call came through from the Station Sergeant, Haley. He said Mr. Price of Holt Farm

was there and wanted to see me at once. Some of his sheep had been savaged and killed on the Common during the night.

"I had an idea there might be more in this than appeared on the surface, and so I left my breakfast and hurried round to the station. Three farmers graze their sheep on the Common: Price, nearest the sea; Weaver, over towards Blackshore; and Sheldon, the western stretch as far as the golf links.

"Price's story was that two of his sheep had been savaged and killed and one partially eaten. Haley had sent Dyer along to see no one interfered with the bodies, and Blake and I immediately accompanied Price to the spot, where a crowd had already gathered. There was a lot of blood about and the sheep that had been half eaten was not a pleasant sight, and the crowd was already exaggerating details or inventing them; prophesying the most gruesome events now to be expected; and generally squeezing the last drop of enjoyment out of the affair.

"We made a pretty thorough examination, but without result. There were no tracks or traces on the Common; none on the road which runs between the Common and the saltings; none on the saltings or the wide stretch of sandy beach.

"As a result of my examination I felt bound to change the opinion about Hosegood I expressed to you the other day. He must have been lying, and young Carruthers too. I felt sure the sheep had been attacked by a puma or jaguar or another of the big cats; and that points straight to Hosegood's Zoo."

"The savaging might have been done by a sheep-dog running amok," Mark said.

Ferris shook his head. "I've seen plenty of sheep killed and savaged by dogs. Occasionally there's been a half-hearted attempt to eat the carcass; the throat torn out; but never anything like the havoc committed on that sheep of Price's: it was more than half eaten. That's not a dog's work. A puma would account for it. Hosegood was lying. I shall make it my business to go over and see him. He is back. I had a call put through and ascertained that. You can smoke, you know; some people don't like smoke when they're feeding; it doesn't affect me."

Mark refilled and lit his pipe. "It does not follow that either Hosegood or Carruthers was lying," he said. "It seems pretty

clear that this business is something which has no connection with anything which has previously happened. This isn't the same 'creature, obviously, that was responsible for the former incidents. This is something much more serious. This is a killer; a deliberate and wanton killer. The other was nothing of the sort; it was more scared than anything else. Baby Jenkins's death was, I am convinced, accidental; incidental would be the better word, perhaps. This, then, absolves Hosegood and Carruthers from any suspicion of deceit or lying. I don't believe for a moment that the creature or creatures responsible for all those minor incidents (minor in comparison with what has now happened) came from Hosegood's Zoo, although I admit I can't offer a reasonable suggestion where they did come from. But I think it quite likely that the creature which killed Price's sheep is one of the big cats and has probably escaped from Hosegood's Zoo. Recently escaped. And I imagine if you called on Hosegood now he would admit there had been an escape, although there had been none prior to your previous visit."

"Well, we shall soon know. Hosegood has agreed to see me at ten to-morrow morning."

"Did you give him any hint why you wanted to see him?"

"No. I assumed he would know."

"But wouldn't he have reported its escape? Isn't that an obligation on the proprietor of a zoo or menagerie?"

"Not a bit. People think it is, but it's not the case. People also think one is bound to report a car accident to the police. That's also not true." He smiled. "In fact, most of the popular beliefs about the police are not true. They don't frogmarch drunks to the station, scraping their faces along the road on the way. They don't bash awkward customers as soon as they get them in the cells. They are not on duty in the room under the execution shed to hang on to the legs of murderers who are, because of the executioner's bungling, being slowly strangled to death instead of instantaneously killed. They don't burgle the houses whose owners have reported to them that they are going on a holiday. They don't make a handsome living from the bribes of prostitutes, mackerels, and brothel keepers; nor are they paid in love by these light ladies for turning a blind eye. They don't—"

"All right!" Mark laughed. "You protest too much. I am now convinced they do all these things. However, the point was that Hosegood is under no obligation to report an escaped animal."

"That's so. They do, of course. It's to their advantage. They're responsible for any damage done. When I say 'they' do, I mean the ordinary run of them. But Hosegood's not ordinary. He's quite definitely a character; abnormal; and if all the tales told of him are true he ought to be certified. But presumably they're not all true. I tried to arrange to see him this afternoon, but he won't be there. Pity. I hate losing time in affairs of this sort. There's always the chance of something else happening and complicating matters, to say nothing of stirring up public opinion."

Public opinion in Seathorpe was already very considerably stirred up and perturbed. Not a few little groups discussed the affair of Farmer Price's sheep at *The Club* that evening; as scores of other little groups had gossiped about it during the day in shops, on street corners, in gardens, and at tea-tables.

One of *The Club* groups, consisting of Mark, Madderson, Dr. Heldar, Dauncey, Fellowes, and Sir Jack Borlase (mellowed now into an almost ingratiating affability), had the advantage of the others of considerable relevant knowledge; but for all that did not succeed in reaching any more profitable conclusion. They had all seen the carcasses, and there too they had the advantage of the majority of their fellow-townsmen (who did not, however, allow this lack of visual information to deter them from putting forward with great self-assurance their theories).

It was, of course, obvious that a sheep-dog turned killer was a possibility, and those whose imaginings had a malicious or ironic bent were not above suggesting that Price's dog Shep would prove the culprit.

It was Madderson who had said: "I suppose we can't entirely rule out the possibility of a killer sheep-dog? or of any dog for that matter?"

"Ferris rules it out definitely," Mark said. "He says no dog could have wrought the havoc seen in the mangled sheep, and the most a dog would have done would have been to tear out the throat. And certainly no dog could eat so much of a full-

grown sheep. He is convinced it was a puma or jaguar or one other of the big cats and that it had escaped from Hosegood's Zoo. He's got an appointment with Hosegood to-morrow morning."

"I don't agree with that," Sir Jack Borlase said; "I've seen plenty of dead sheep what had been attacked by dingoes, and they was more of a mess than Price's sheep. A hungry dingo'll eat nearly a whole sheep. And what's a dingo but a dog? I'll lay any odds it turns out to be a dog; and a Seathorpe dog at that. 'Course, it might've been a dingo if Hosegood's got any specimens and one has got loose. Or a hyena or wolf. Yeah. And how do we know it was only one what done it? Supposing this Hosegood guy's lost one of his animals: why not more'n one?"

"I'm not sure I don't agree with Ferris," Fellowes said. "I thought both sheep showed just those signs of ripping and rending which are characteristic of the attack of a big cat: puma, jaguar, leopard, lion, tiger; they all rip after they have secured a hold, and tend to eviscerate their prey rather than to tear out the throat."

"Yeah. But dingoes and wolves and those fellers eat where they kill. The big cats don't. They drag 'em into hiding. I saw a picture once and there was a big guy in it who'd hunted big cats all over the world, and he said they never ate their kill out in the open. Dingoes do. Yeah. I seen 'em."

"It struck me," Dauncey said, "that both sheep, the half-eaten one especially, had been subjected to a form of attack that one would not associate with either the dog or cat species. The head was partly wrenched off and the skull stove in as if it had been struck with a hammer."

"Yeah. But I seen a dingo crack a knuckle-bone as thick as my wrist."

"But the head nearly wrenched off, Sir Jack!"

"Yeah. I'm not saying a dingo'd do that. I never seen it."

"Well," Dr. Helder smiled; "we shall know to-morrow."

"And supposing Hosegood swears there have been no escapes from the Zoo?" Madderson said.

"Then," Fellowes said, "either Hosegood is a liar, which I think more than likely, or we're faced with a problem as bewildering as that of the other incidents, which are now com-

pletely put in the shade and, unless they recur, will be forgotten in a week by all except those poor young Jenkinses. I believe Passmore said earlier in the evening that he was convinced the two things were entirely separate."

"Not convinced," Mark said; "but the evidence does seem to me to point that way."

"I don't agree. I don't mean I entirely disagree. But my mind inclines towards the view that the origin or cause of both phenomena will turn out to be the same; and if Hosegood says there have been no escapes my inclination will be very much strengthened, although," with a dry smile, "I shall still maintain that Hosegood is probably a liar."

"Butter on one side and jam on the other!" Madderson laughed. "As far as I'm concerned, I hope Hosegood has lost one of his big cats. Anything's better to my pedestrian sort of temperament than something which defies solution and which into the bargain seems to be without rhyme or reason; sheer lunacy; no connection with ordinary things. Give me a solid tiger every time in preference to some fantastic will-o'-the-wisp. And I'm not afraid of ghosts. I'm not afraid of them because I've satisfied myself that ghosts can't exist. But I admit to finding uncanny and scaring the thought of the damned thing or things whose nocturnal capers have been disturbing Seathorpe's peace and quiet for the last five weeks or so."

"Yeah. But there are ghosts. The night my father died—and he died a hundred mile from where I was in bed; I was a kid o' seven at the time—I woke and saw him standing by my bed. He stood there a long while, and I thought it was him in the flesh. That's why I lay doggo. I didn't want a belting. And then he went out. Like blowing out a candle. Yeah. There's ghosts all right. He was dead when I seen him."

It not seeming purposeful or profitable to any of the others to obtrude the subject of hallucinations in the face of such sincere belief, Mark suggested poker, and they went up to the cardroom.

The morning disclosed events which added considerably to Superintendent Ferris's anxieties and increased the alarm already felt in the town, moving the people surely, if as yet imperceptibly, towards that condition of fear from which

spring hysteria and panic. Will Price had a more exciting, a more horrible, story to tell. Determined, he said, to get at the root of the business, he had kept watch on the Common with his dog Shep as his companion. He had armed himself with a loaded stick and carried a powerful torch. About half-past two in the morning the sheep over by the road near the saltings seemed to be disturbed and there was some bleating and movement. Price, then over a quarter of a mile away, ran towards them, shining his torch and sending Shep on ahead.

Price, a heavily built man in the fifties, was in no condition for running and, far outdistanced by Shep, it was more than two minutes before he reached the sheep, which were still agitated. There was no sign of Shep. He whistled, and when the dog did not come to the whistle grew anxious; obedience to that whistle was automatic in Shep, and he would certainly have come if he had heard it and was able. It did not seem possible on so still a night that the dog could be out of range of that piercing and familiar note; and, the object of his watch for the moment forgotten, Price set off with increased anxiety to look for Shep. He had not gone far when he almost stumbled into the dead bodies of two sheep, both half eaten. About a hundred yards farther on, and almost at the verge of the road, he came upon the dead body of Shep. The dog had been terribly savaged; its head was crushed and nearly torn from its body; its left hind leg ripped completely off at the haunch. All around were signs of a fierce and bloody struggle. The sheep-dog had died game. But there were no other signs. Nor were there any tracks on the road or, beyond the saltings, on the sands.

It was by now about three o'clock. Price was afraid to leave his sheep to report the bloody affair lest the creature or creatures returned. He admitted afterwards that he was considerably scared, the more so as his torch, although the battery was a new one, gave out and the rest of his vigil was in darkness, for the sky was heavily clouded. It speaks well for his pluck and determination that he continued that lonely and nerve-trying ordeal until dawn came just before seven o'clock.

Ferris was able to add an account of this startling experience to that of the former one when he called on Mr. Morti-

mer Hosegood at the Zoo that morning at ten o'clock. But there was no satisfaction or information to be obtained from the millionaire, who was in an affable if facetious mood, preferring suggestions so fantastic as to lend some colour to Ferris's half-serious contention that the Zoo proprietor was mentally certifiable.

"There have been no escapes of animals from this Zoo, Mr. Superintendent," Hosegood said. "I trust the sherry is agreeable to your palate. You will forgive my not joining you, but I cannot tolerate wine so early in the day. I prefer to keep my mind clear. But for the pleasure your company gives me I should, speaking as a ratepayer, regret your visit. For you are wasting your time here. This is not the tree you should be barking up. Only a pedant would say 'up which you should be barking.' The people know better than the pedants. Barking up is forceful; the other a schoolmarm's mew.

"But I am, I assure you, sincerely sorry that your sense of duty should have dragged you on such an abortive visit. The more so as the truth you seek is probably lying near your own doorstep. That is a commonplace which the expert is so often inclined to forget. You should look in Seathorpe, not here in Denacre. Allow me to offer you a few suggestions. Have you checked up on (a beautiful phrase, don't you think? so forcible, so illiterate): have you checked up on the Congregational parson? I forget his name."

Ferris, not for the moment quite sure of his ground, stared at Hosegood; but took the question seriously, and said, "You mean the Rev. Charles Furse."

"Furse: is that the name? Ah, yes, Furse. A small man with the face of a Pekinese. I have often thought of offering him a benefice here. Have you observed that all men belong facially to some animal type: the fox, the rat, the pug-dog, the weasel, the terrier, the sheep (Wordsworth is the most celebrated sheep face), the horse (Disraeli is our finest horse face), the camel (the late Lord Balfour), and so forth. Quite a fascinating study, I assure you. Now what type am I? The goat. You don't see it possibly. The eye needs training. But once the eye is trained to perceive you'll be astonished and fascinated at the new world of delight opened to you. But we were talking of the Congregational parson, and now I've for-

gotten the little man's name again. Ah, thank you: Furse. Now, Superintendent, the Rev. Furse (a solecism, I admit, but I like the sound of the Rev. Furse; it has a subtle quality of feeling absent from the Rev. Charles Furse): the Rev. Furse, I say, is a Nonconformist. It has long been an accepted fact that Nonconformists devour their young, and a man who eats his children would think nothing of a sheep. I suggest the Rev. Furse is your man.

"Or there's Rosenbaum, the jeweller in the High Street. What of him, now? He is a practising Jew. A very devout man, I believe. Obviously he is your man. For centuries Jews have ritually murdered Christian boys and girls. I follow our cruder theological historians. It may be there is a dearth of Christian boys and girls in Seathorpe, despite the efforts of the shepherds and the largeness of the Sabbath congregations. The little lambs lacking, our good Rosenbaum of necessity is driven to sheep. Farmer Price has lost his sheep by a ritual slaughter. Probably, if you could get all the facts, done just before the sun rose: that is the traditional moment for ritual murder. Undoubtedly Isaac Rosenbaum is your man. Or, alternatively, the Rev. Furse."

Ferris, rather at a loss how to cope with this facetious far-rago, and handicapped by the fact that Hosegood was a generous donor to the Police charitable funds, terminated the interview by refusing a second glass of sherry, expressing regret for having troubled him, and bidding him good morning.

Seathorpe was decidedly *not* in a facetious mood. The town was taking the matter with the utmost seriousness, and plans, both official and unofficial, were made during the day to deal with these manifestations, already alarming and threatening to become worse. Price, Weaver, and Sheldon, the three farmers using the Common for grazing their sheep, had under a common menace decided to sink dislikes of many years' standing and to agree to patrol the Common that night, armed with shot-guns and furnished with torches, but without their dogs. There was a party from *The Club*, which included Dauncey, who was taking his Winchester; old Major Fenway, with his Webley automatic; and Prosper Fellowes with his flashlight camera and a stout ash-stick. Inspector Blake had arranged for Sergeant Craven and Constables

Hoyle, Shuffley, and Dyer to take duty on the Common from sunset to dawn, and Ferris did not feel called upon to interfere with this arrangement, although it left the streets of the town unpatrolled.

It was a night of some excitement, both on the Common and in the town. There was a good deal of hasty sporadic shooting, as was to be expected; and one casualty: P.C. Hoyle, whose leg was peppered. In the town itself there were numerous scares, all in houses near the Common and adjacent to the sea. Chicken runs were raided and smashed, and Bert Gittings's small poultry farm was attacked and considerable havoc wrought. There was a certain amount of wild revolver shooting near Gittings's place; but not by Bert Gittings, who slept through the noise and was inclined to suggest in the morning that the whole thing was a put-up job under cover of which some of the riff-raff of the town had raided his fowls. But there were no captures made and no one, except a Captain Royce, saw anything. The first light of morning, however, disclosed what it was hoped would prove a clue: a series of tracks leading straight across the sands into the sea. These were examined, sketched, and photographed; but with negative results. All both Fellowes and Dauncey would say was that they were definitely not made by the same creature as the former tracks, and that they were not made by any creature of which they had any knowledge. At Ferris's suggestion photographs and drawings were sent to the secretary of the Zoological Gardens, London, and to Mr. Hosegood, with a request for information.

Captain Royce, who had been wounded and gassed in the War and eked out his pension with a small patrimony, called at the Station during the morning to see Superintendent Ferris.

"Ah, Captain Royce," Ferris said, "it was good of you to call; I was sending Sergeant Haley round to see you, but this will be more satisfactory. I understand your garden was broken into and rather damaged."

"Damaged, Old Boy, is drawing it mild; the demned place is a shembles. I was woken by the howling uproar in Gittings's place and took up my position in my den with a loaded Webley, a torch, and the window open."

"And you saw something?"

"Old Boy, I saw the devil. I caught sight of him——"

"Of him, sir?"

"The devil, Old Boy; the devil; must have been him, as you'll see in a moment. I caught sight of him crossing my lawn; a dark shape sidling across. I grabbed for my torch, and in my excitement knocked it out of the window. But I could still see Diabolus, and gave him three rounds rapid. And then three more. And then I went downstairs to inspect the corpse. Nothing there, Old Boy. Six shots at twenty yards, and I was the best revolver shot in the Fourth Division. And nothing there, Old Boy. Gone. The thin-air business. And not a drop of blood. If it wasn't the devil himself, it was one of his subordinates."

"Could you describe it a little more clearly?"

"I'm afraid not, Old Boy. Just a dark shape. Not tall. But not short. Well, shortish. Squat. Rotund."

"Did it remind you of anything? of any animal?"

"It was no animal, Old Boy. It was the devil. Not that I knew at the time. I came to that conclusion when I found nothing in my garden except a demned shembles. A posteriori. I was the best revolver shot in the Fourth Division. No, Old Boy; if it was like anything, it was like Pithecanthrope. But squat. Going on all fours, probably. I believe Pithecanthrope went on all fours at times, Old Boy. Er—when he forgot himself."

"Well, thank you, Captain Royce. I think that may prove useful. My very best thanks for calling."

"Pleasure, Old Boy. Public duty. Er—about the demage. Who foots the bill, Old Boy? I mean the garden a demned shembles. A lifetime's toil ruined."

"I'm afraid," Ferris answered with much gravity, "that we shall have to leave that question in abeyance. We cannot fix responsibility until we have someone on whom to fix it. I am sure you will appreciate that."

"O very much, Old Boy. But a demned shembles. Public scandal. Something will have to be done. I wish you good morning."

Superintendent Ferris himself took the drawings and photographs over to the Denacre Zoo to ask for assistance in identi-

fying the tracks. Mr. Hosegood received him agreeably and discussed the matter with seriousness; nor was there throughout the interview any trace of that facetiousness which had irritated Ferris the previous morning. He said that he was unable to identify the tracks, but that he did not pretend to be an expert, and he sent for half a dozen of his keepers who had been connected with private and public zoos all their lives in various parts of the world and would presumably be familiar with the tracks made by any known animal. These men all admitted their inability to say what animal had made the tracks, nor would they, with one exception, risk a guess. Several of them pointed out that tracks with which they were familiar would be those on the sanded floors of cages, which would be very different from those made in natural sand or soil. The keeper who hazarded a guess was an elderly man named Crowson, who said, if it were possible, he'd say the tracks had been made by a giant crab, as they were very much the same, he thought, as those he had seen on tropical coasts made by big crabs, although he admitted that it was more than thirty years ago.

It did not seem to Ferris that this idea of a giant crab was worth following up; it was such an obvious impossibility and he hadn't time to waste chasing chimeras. The affair was getting too serious for that. When Hosegood suggested his sending drawings and photographs to the London Zoo, Ferris said this had already been done, but that having drawn blank at Denacre he had no great hope of getting any help from London. (And, in fact, when a fortnight later the secretary of the London Zoological Gardens replied, it was merely to return the material and express regret that they had been unable to identify the tracks.)

That Saturday's issue of *The Seathorpe Weekly Times* contained an illustrated article on the week's events. The illustrations were from drawings and photographs by Prosper Fellowes; but the article was unsigned. It could not be doubted, however, that it was from the editor's pen, for it was written with all his characteristic impetuosity and bias. It was derisive of what had been done and plain-spoken about what ought to have been done. It hinted that the police were a troupe of nincompoops, and ended: "It has throughout

modern historical time been a truism in England that nothing need be done about anything as long as it is only the common people who are affected. It is only when someone of importance is threatened with hurt, or, shattering blasphemy, actually hurt, that England bestirs itself and does something; and to some purpose. Everyone is made uncomfortable. Dirty linen is washed on the roofs and fluttered from the chimney-pots. Thousands of the rank and file are dismissed. A few dozen of the higher-ups are degraded. And one or two top-button mandarins are admonished. And then the great pig of England settles down again in its sty. Must these alarming events continue in Seathorpe until someone of importance (we will not proceed to the invidiousness of names) is attacked either in purse or person?"

Tom Palmer was at *The White Cottage* on Monday morning, and Mark stopping for a chat with him, he said: "That red-headed yobbo has got the nail on the head this week all right all right."

"Who's that?" Mark asked.

"Mr. Clarke. Mr. Paddy Mervyn Clarke. 've you read it?"

Mark nodded, smiling.

"And ain't it right? And it's about the first bit o' truth I seen in the rag. But ain't it true? Why do they have all slum kids vaccinated? Save 'em from getting smallpox, the poor little dears? Not on your life. To save 'em from getting smallpox and starting an epidemic which might reach the Nobs. But bugs and lice and broken floors and stinks and damp walls and one closet for twelve people aren't going to do any harm to the Nobs, and so they let the slums stop and the poor bastards stew in 'em and to hell with them. Ever lived in a slum? I have. When you've lived in a slum it makes you laugh to hear parsons rorting on and bands playing Rule Britannia and all the other stuff. Democracy. I ask you. Hold me up.

"On'y thing worse'n living in an English slum is serving in an English merchant ship. I know. I done both. Ever know a Yank serve in an English ship? I'll bet you haven't. Ask one to sign on. Gawd A'mighty! he'd sock you one. In the American merchant service they're treated like human beings. Baths. Proper bunks. Wireless. Good grub and three times the

pay of a British merchant seaman. Three times. You think that's a lie. Ask anyone what knows. And if they got a complaint to make against the Old Man or the Mate, there's courts they can do it at and a lawyer to put their case. Supposing a British merchant seaman's got a complain to make, what's he do? Nothing. Makes you laugh, don't it? A British merchant seaman in an English ship's got about as much chance o' getting a square deal as the poor bastards in a English slum have. What about this? It happened to me.

"I was twenty at the time and serving in the brig *John Dory*. She was a dry ship and trim and easy to handle, and when you've said that you've said everything. Happy ship? Don't make me laugh. And the Old Man was a proper sod. I've eaten some bad grub in my time, but the scran dished out to us in the *John Dory* was the last word. Dog's dinner? Blimey! a ruddy duck wouldn't 'a touched it, and a duck'll eat a seagull's leavings.

"Well, the grub got worse and worse; it was fair poisonous. We used to chuck it overboard 'alf the time, and had to hold our noses while doing it. Think I'm making it up, don't you? I don't blame you. Who'd believe it? Good old England. Good old democracy. Land o' Hope and Glory. Gawd save the King. It got so horrible at last that something had to be done about it, and Bob Smale (nice little chap from Kettering; died with a stomach ulcer on his next spell at 'ome)—Bob got out the cards and I got the low 'un, and it was up to me.

"The next day it was stew. And it stank. Phew! We didn't taste it. It was up to me, and I didn't fancy the job. I knew the Old Man, and I was on'y a youngster. But it was up to me. So I ups with the ruddy tin and away I goes to the Old Man's cabin and knocks wi' my boot, hands being occupied. Out comes the steward, and asks me what the 'ell I want. And when I says the Skipper, he says don't be a bloody fool, the Skipper's having his dinner, and he shuts the door.

"So I gives it another touch of my boot and out comes the steward again and asks me what the 'ell I want, and when I says the Skipper he grins and says, 'Right! I'll tell him.'

"Presently out comes the Old Man. His moustache is all wet and so's his beard, and he's sucking his teeth. 'Well, Palmer,' he says, 'what d'you want?'

“ ‘It’s this ‘ere, sir,’ I says.

“ ‘What is it?’ he says.

“ ‘It’s our dinner,’ I says.

“ ‘What about it, Palmer?’ he says; ‘what about it?’

“ ‘It’s poison,’ I says; ‘fair poison; and it stinks.’

“ ‘Oh,’ he says, sniffing ‘ard, ‘stinks, does it? I can’t smell anything. Steward!’ And out comes the steward, and the Old Man says, ‘Steward, can you smell anything?’ ‘On’y stew smell, sir,’ the steward says, and grins at me behind the Old Man’s back and at the rest of the chaps from the fo’c’sle who were all watching and listening.

“ The Old Man looks at me and says, ‘Poison, is it?’

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ I says; ‘horrible; it’d kill a dog.’

“ ‘Steward,’ he says, ‘bring me a spoon.’ The steward brings a spoon and gives it to the Old Man, and he takes a little o’ the gravy up in it and puts it in his mouth and rolls it round on his tongue, and then spits it out. ‘Steward,’ he says, ‘bring me the cook.’

“ Presently Slushy comes over from the galley, and the Old Man says, pointing to the poison, ‘Did you cook this?’

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ Slushy says.

“ ‘And what do you mean by it, dam’ your eyes?’ the Old Man bawls.

“ It fair paralyses Slushy and he just stands there and gawps.

“ ‘I say what the ‘ell d’you mean by it?’ the Old Man shouts, ‘cooking better food for the men than you do for me! What d’you mean by it? Don’t let it occur again.’ And he jerks his thumb towards the galley.

“ Then he turns to me with a wicked look on his face. ‘Poison, is it, Palmer?’ he says; and if you’d heard him you’d know what a rattlesnake’d sound like if it could talk. ‘Poison, is it?’

“ ‘Yes, sir,’ I says, standing my ground.

“ ‘Is it? Come here. Give it to me.’ And he took the tin and turned it upside down over my head and then bashed me with it and bawled: ‘Beat it, you gutter rat!’ and as I turned he put his boot to my backside; and he took a twelve; and he didn’t just put it there; he landed me a kick that a’most broke my spine.

"And when we got back to port I laid a complaint. Eh?"  
Palmer stooped and picked up the handle of the lawn-mower.  
"Don't make me laugh."

## *Chapter Twelve*

### THE THING

**I**N one of the articles Mark was contributing at this time to *The Morning Courier* he had written: "A volume might profitably be written on the village idiot. Among all the world's villages there can be few without its specimen, from the pathetic cretins of Derbyshire to the hydrocephalous dwarfs of Normandy; from the rickety hunchbacks of Ireland to the squat little monsters of Middle Europe. They range from the slobbering imbecile to the shrewd eccentric, and many of them are by no means so daft as they pretend to be. They have, at least in this country, successfully solved, equally with the cat, the problem of how to persuade the world to support them in comfort, without any return. They do not work. They are not expected to work. Somebody or other supplies their needs. There is for them always corn in Egypt: does this explain their ubiquity?"

Seathorpe had its village idiot; but as Seathorpe was not a village and Jaunty Muir was not an idiot, the phrase could not have been more of a misnomer. But Jaunty was marked with the authentic stamp: he did no work: he owned no master. He had a small two-roomed cottage at the edge of the salttings to the north of the town. His garden was just a fenced in patch of the surrounding common land, and was no more tended. For vegetables he depended upon gifts (how could he be expected to understand the intricacies of gardening?); for meat he fished, poached rabbits, and was not above stealing chickens (but in a world where nations rise to greatness and bankers to power by stealing, who shall impute that to him as a crime?); for clothes and boots he also depended upon gifts, and if his coverings were a mixed bag that but added a

touch of picturesqueness to his appearance; and he never went cold. Nor did he lack firing, for the jetsam of the shore was his almost by prescriptive right: certainly the first picking was his. He did not drink or smoke. He paid no rent, for the cottage was derelict although weathertight. There was nothing repellent in his appearance; far from it; with his mass of iron-grey curls, his long grizzled beard, his beaklike nose, bronzed skin, and bizarre costume, he took the eye; and during the summer season he was one of the 'sights' of Seathorpe, and was the recipient of many sixpences and shillings from visitors who (unsuccessfully) tried to engage him in conversation. What he did with this money (no inconsiderable sum in the course of the season) no one knew: he never spent any of it: he never bought anything. Possibly it never entered his head to buy anything. Why should it? He looked a well-preserved sixty, but was at least ten years older. Madderson was fond of saying that Jaunty Muir was in fact a genius: a man who, in a world of increasing ugliness, unhappiness, and horror, had constructed his own little earthly paradise where there were no masters, no money, no possessions; and where an abundance of necessities and even luxuries were always at hand for the taking.

Such was his natural or assumed taciturnity that few could claim more than an exchanged word or so with him; and with most he kept an aloof silence. He was much given, especially between October and March, to night walks. It was no secret that he was a skilful poacher. But he was Jaunty Muir; as far as the people of Seathorpe were concerned, he had the privileges of a spoilt child. Gamekeepers turned a blind eye; as did the police upon his other depredations; they were, after all, but trifles; and there would have been nothing but contempt and recrimination to be gained in a case brought against Jaunty. And to jail him was unthinkable. The village idiot is put behind bars only when his habits are sexually aberrant.

It was just after one o'clock on the morning of Wednesday November the third that Jaunty Muir slipped out of his cottage with his stick, his snares, and his bag. He did not own a dog. Dogs cost money. And those faculties indispensable to such night operations as Jaunty engaged in were as sharp in

him as in any dog. And dogs sometimes made mistakes, a thing Jaunty never did.

It was a cloudy night. There was a nip in the air; and over the sea there were patches of fog. Jaunty walked at a sharp pace, almost due north. He had covered a fair distance when the clock of St. John's chimed the quarter, and he was by now well away from the town. And at exactly one-twenty-six by Constable Shuffley's watch he was pounding along the front screaming. As he reached Constable Shuffley he collapsed. He was half naked, the clothes having apparently been ripped off him, and was bleeding profusely from wounds in his calves, thighs, and buttocks. He was taken to the Cottage Hospital, but it was not until late on the Thursday evening that he spoke; and then it was the merest rambling, interspersed with shouts and screams. But any coherent testimony could not be expected from him, and it was felt in the town how very unfortunate it was that the attack had not been made upon either Constable Shuffley or Coastguard Iles, when there would have been a chance of this puzzling, alarming business being cleared up. But it must be said that this opinion, submitted to Constable Shuffley in *The Goat* that evening, did not receive his support: rather an understatement, perhaps, in view of the constable's hostile stare and snapped comment: "Oh, *do* you? Well, I don't. And if you're trying to be funny it's not my idea of a joke."

One of the amenities of Seathorpe was Madame Edyth Fraybel's Dancing Academy. Madame Fraybel had in her younger days been a dancer whose legs had added to the attractions of *The Alhambra* and to several London and provincial pantomimes, as the framed photographs on the walls of the Academy attested; photographs which, after one's eyes had taken in Madame Fraybel's now overblown proportions, it was impossible to regard without a sigh for the transience of youth and beauty. Madame Fraybel specialised in children's dancing and her pupils were many, for her fees were really not beyond the reach of any parents willing to make some sacrifices for their children's accomplishments. Madame Fraybel was assisted by two of her former pupils, the Misses Gwynneth and Isolde Huckstable, plain and angular virgins in the middle twenties. Twice a year, in November and

March, Madame Fraybel gave a Grand Display at the Town Hall, all the profits of which were devoted to some local charity. And if these were sprats to catch mackerel, that is in the human as well as the commercial tradition. On these occasions the Town Hall was naturally crowded out, for such opportunities of worthily indulging in a debauch of sentimentality are rare and not to be forgone, even by the most cynical. Saturday November the sixth had been fixed for the Display, and on Friday evening a dress rehearsal was held to which the parents of all the children taking part were admitted free. All the mothers without exception annually attended such a rehearsal if it were humanly possible to be present, and quite a number of the fathers, although this year there were fewer fathers because the Annual Sprat Supper was that evening being held at the Drill Hall, an unfortunate clash, but unavoidable owing to heavy bookings of both halls for dances. The one mother not present this year was Mrs. Mayhew, whose ten-year-old Tessie was one of the stars of the performance. Mrs. Mayhew was in bed, a victim of the influenza epidemic which was then beginning. Tessie's father Will, a fisherman, would certainly have taken his wife's place but for his indispensable presence at the Sprat Supper: indispensable because a Sprat Supper without Will Mayhew's rendering of *O Ruddier than the Cherry, Tom Bowling*, and *Hearts of Oak* was unthinkable. But Fred Jellicoe and his wife (the parents of another little performer), who lived quite close to the Mayhews, were both going, and had promised to look after Tessie and see her safely home.

The Sprat Supper was the oldest Seathorpe institution, beside which the annual football match between Seathorpe and Renham was a babe. It went back centuries to the beginnings of the town as a little fishing hamlet in the reign of that Norman king Stephen who died, in the quaint phraseology of the chronicler, *with the iliac passion and with an old disease of the emrods*, which has a picturesque, a romantic, indeed a regal smack, fading, alas! in the light of modern interpretation: an abscess of the appendix accompanied by bleeding from chronic piles.

There was considerable ceremonial at the Sprat Supper, at least at the beginning. The Mayor, Aldermen, Councillors,

and the Mace and Sword Bearers, attended in full regalia. The Mayor (who each year learned the piece by heart) spoke of the long tradition of the Sprat Supper, which 'from time immemorial' had 'inaugurated the opening of the sprat fishing season.' He then went on to describe that 'for ever memorable Sprat Supper which, in the third year of the reign of Good Queen Bess, was interrupted by a violent tempest and a high tide which caused a great flooding of the town both by the torrents of rain and by the inundation of the sea, whereby great damage was done and many lives lost.' Bringing his discourse by easy stages up to modern times, the Mayor then called upon the Rev. Xavier Cunningham to ask God to bless the sea with fruitfulness ('Almighty God, in whose merciful and loving hands are all the harvests of the earth and of the waters under the earth, we do beseech Thee of Thy bounty and lovingkindness to grant that these fishermen assembled here, Thy most humble servants . . .'). This done, the oldest fisherman and the youngest one present slowly advanced upon the Mayor, the one bearing a silver salver upon which lay a dozen or so smoking sprats, the other a silver salver with a slice of brown bread. These the Mayor slowly and ritually devoured; washed down the little meal from a tankard of beer proffered to him by the coxswain of the lifeboat; and then in slow and solemn words gave permission for the feast to begin.

There was nothing solemn about the rest of the evening. If prodigious quantities of sprats were eaten (and some of the men thought nothing of stowing away a few hundreds, eating heads, tails, and bones), prodigious quantities of beer were drunk, for the town had, by its Charter from James I, to provide two quarts a head; and various charitable persons (among them the cantankerous Mrs. Duquesne) paid for a pint a head; while there were new pipes for all who wanted them and a generous supply of tobacco and cigarettes. After the eating and drinking came the smoking and drinking, with plenty of songs, recitations, and comic turns to keep things going. There were strong stomachs and strong heads there, but even the strongest showed before the evening ended more than slight traces of the orgy; and few Roman feasts could have provided a heavier tally of casualties.

The Sprat Suppers did not break up much before midnight,

so that by their measure of time the night was still young when the dress rehearsal at the Town Hall came to an end. Madame Fraybel had curtailed many of the items so that the youngest children should not be out late two nights in succession; and, indeed, as the dancers and their parents streamed out of the Town Hall, Will Mayhew, a bare stone's-throw away, was, to loud applause and the banging of tankards, about to give his first song. Little Tessie Mayhew had already had her triumph, her *pas seul* in the playlet *The Toy Soldier's Dream* having brought down the house.

The Mayhews' cottage was the last one on the northern edge of the town; its back garden reached almost to the salt ings, and the only building farther north before Coveness was Jaunty Muir's shack. The Jellicoës' cottage was no more than a hundred yards away, a matter of only a few minutes from one back door to the other; and so when the Jellicoës reached their cottage they said good night to Tessie, and Tom Jellicoë stood at his gate to watch her until she reached her own back garden. The path she had to take ran along by a hedge, and although the night was dark Tom could follow her progress most of the way. He reckoned that she had surely reached her back garden and he had turned to enter his own back door when a scream startled him. He stopped short, hesitated a moment, and at another and more piercing scream ran down the garden, vaulted the low fence, and ran towards the Mayhews' cottage. As he did so from a neighbouring garden a firework display began, with half a dozen rockets hissing heavenwards and the loud explosions of three giant crackers. It was this which probably saved Tessie's life.

The momentary light showed him plainly Tessie lying just off the path and almost at the wicket gate in the fence of her own back garden. She lay there a crumpled, still little heap of light and dark clothes. For a moment he saw, or thought he saw (he was not certain afterwards), a black shape moving away so quickly that it was almost immediately gone. He heard too, or thought he heard, a heavy scuttling, almost a rattling noise. He was unarmed; he had not even a torch; he did not fancy a barehanded encounter with some ferocious animal. And in any case little Tessie needed all his attention.

He lifted her up, not knowing if she were dead, and hesi-

tated, wondering where it would be best to take her: the Mayhews' cottage, his, or the Cottage Hospital, not more than five minutes' walk away. Fortunately he decided on the hospital, and this undoubtedly saved Tessie's life. The child's clothing was ripped and torn and there were lacerated wounds on the body and legs, several of which were bleeding so profusely that she would have died had not immediate medical attention been available. The Matron sent Tom to fetch Will Mayhew, who was completely sober by the time he reached the hospital, where the house surgeon told him that while none of the child's wounds was mortal they were serious enough, and in view of the fact that she was suffering severely from shock he could not just then give any assurance that she would recover.

But Tessie did recover, although it was several days before she was able to give any account of what had happened, and nearly a fortnight before she was able to leave hospital. But her account was as vague and unhelpful as Tom Jellicoe's, if more definite. All she could say was that as she turned off the path to her gate she heard what she described as a scrunching noise behind her, but before she could turn round a thing jumped on her back and she felt herself falling, and that was all she remembered.

Her description of her attacker as a thing seemed to touch the town's imagination shudderingly, and while the Terror lasted the creature was referred to as The Thing.

For a Terror did undoubtedly now descend upon Seathorpe; and its first manifestation was the cancelling of the Dancing Display. It was a decision dictated not so much by wisdom as by the returning of hundreds of tickets on the Saturday morning and the plain indication that the townspeople were nervous about being out after dark and would certainly not venture out merely for entertainment, even for the most drawing of all entertainments, a display of their children's talents and pretty frocks.

Superintendent Ferris took the unusual step of arming the constables on night duty with revolvers, and Divisional Officer Bayley issued the coastguard on night patrol with a cutlass. That was the extent of the official precautions; but private enterprise went much further, and on Saturday night armed

parties, totalling in all nearly two hundred men, patrolled the Common, the sands, the salttings, and the countryside as far as Blackshore to the south, the Half-Way House to the west towards Renham, and the famous tumuli out on the moorland to the north.

On that Saturday night, nerves being at tension, there were, as was to be expected, some incidents and a certain amount of shooting. But there were no casualties and no encounters with The Thing (or The Things, for the possibility of there being more than one was faced).

Sunday and Monday nights also passed off uneventfully except for a few alarms and some spasmodic shooting. One of the Common patrols on Tuesday night consisted of Mark, Madderson, Major Fenway, Austin Dauncey, and Sir Jack Borlase.

Mark was to breakfast in bed that morning, and about half-past eight Mrs. Paradock brought it in to him with his newspapers and mail. He made some remark about feeling tired, to which she paid little attention. She was clearly bursting with news, and out it came. "O sir," she said, putting the tray down on the dressing-table, "Sir Jack Borlase is dead."

Mark sat up: "Sir Jack Borlase dead!"

"Yes, sir; dead and et up. Horrible!"

"Dead and eaten!" Mark repeated incredulously. "When did you hear this?"

"Postman told me, sir. And the paper boy had it too."

"Are you sure they said eaten?"

"Well, half et up, sir. But isn't it horrible? And him only just married. It's terrible. That poor young thing. Why don't the police do something? Are they going to wait till we've all been et?"

It was a question the whole town, astir and horrified at the news, was already asking fearfully. It was also asking other questions. Sir Jack must have been attacked on his return from the patrol: he was armed with a heavy-game double-barrelled rifle: why had he not fired? How could he, a strong and wiry young man, have been killed without being able to strike a blow? What was this Thing? Superstition, legend, and lore began to creep in and add lurid colours to the stark fact: that he was not eaten, but that the body had been

drained of all its blood; that the head was missing; that all but the trunk was missing; that he had been savagely and obscenely ('unmentionably' was the popular word) mutilated; that his face was a mask of staring horror; that prints, hoof-prints like a goat's but bigger, were all round the body.

It was then, with a sense of tremendous relief, that the town learned an hour or so later that Sir Jack had been merely stabbed to death. The sensation of that was still hot when shortly before noon it was reported that the half-eaten body of an unknown woman had been found under a hedge in a field about a quarter of a mile from *Freyne Court*. So The Thing had had its victim: but who had killed Sir Jack Borlase? That question for the moment shifted the focal point of the town's interest.

The inquest on the dead baronet was to be held the next day, but that evening, on his way to *The Club*, Mark fell in with Ferris, and as they walked along together the Superintendent said, "I've a theory which fits all the facts, and if it turns out to be true it'll be a pretty kettle of fish. I propose to put it in at the inquest, and I don't think I ought to mention it now, if you'll forgive my reticence."

"Do you mean The Thing?"

"No, unfortunately. So far we're defeated. I'm referring to poor young Borlase."

"I'm afraid I'm equally at sea over that, too," Mark said.

"There I have the advantage of you," Ferris said, "in possessing a piece of information of the utmost significance. I am really sorry to have to be so damned official about it, and I apologise for mentioning the affair at all."

Mark laughed. "I think I mentioned it first; and anyhow it's a topic impossible to avoid."

Dr. Heldar was less discreet at *The Club* that evening; but as only Mark and Madderson were his auditors, and he told them in confidence, the usual excuses may be made for him. He had conducted a post-mortem that afternoon upon the body of the dead baronet and also upon the half-eaten body of the unknown woman.

"Sir Jack," he said, "died from a knife wound in the heart. The woman was, it seems clear, a victim of The Thing. Sir Jack was stabbed from in front. Why, in view of the fact that

he was a strong young man and armed, he allowed a stranger to get close enough to stab him would be something of a problem."

"It might not have been a stranger," Madderson said.

"Is there anything to connect the dead woman with his murder?" Mark asked.

Heldar nodded. "Yes," he said, "and that answers you both. The woman's vest bore the tab of a shop in Brisbane. She had a sheath knife which was also bought in Australia."

Mark whistled softly and Madderson slowly nodded his head, while Heldar said, "It's not difficult to see what line Ferris will take at the inquest."

"Does he think she was his wife?" Mark asked.

"He thinks it more than a possibility," Heldar said; "and I agree."

"In which case," Madderson said, "little Amy Watson that was is not Lady Borlase."

Heldar nodded. "It's already a tragic enough affair for her, poor child, and may be infinitely worse. At present she's completely bowled over. There is no question of her appearing at the inquest. She has, in fact, no evidence to give. There is, apart from medical evidence and that of finding the bodies, nothing at all to put to the coroner, except Ferris's surmise, and that may take weeks to verify, although I understand cables will be sent immediately to the authorities concerned in Australia."

"Is Ferris justified," Madderson asked, "in putting forward what, after all, is only a hypothesis, in view of the great mental distress which it will cause this young girl?"

"I can, as her medical attendant, answer for the business being kept from her for some time," Heldar said; "she is at present in no condition to see anyone, and I shall see that papers are kept from her. With these precautions, and Ferris knows they will be taken, he is entirely justified in putting his view to the coroner. In fact, I consider him bound to do so. It will no doubt entail the adjourning of the inquest until verification can be obtained from Australia, but I think that what evidence we already have makes it pretty clear that this unknown woman killed Borlase: he had been obviously stabbed with a weapon of the kind possessed by the woman, and the

one she had had been recently used, improperly wiped, and was still, close up to the haft, faintly smeared with fresh human blood. And there is, of course, the fact that he allowed himself to be approached so closely: obviously whoever it was who approached him was no stranger; was, indeed, it seems to me, someone with whom he had been in intimate relationship."

"A wife, for example," Madderson said.

"Or a discarded mistress," Mark added; to which Heldar said, "It's to be devoutly hoped the latter. She was a young woman; in the twenties; well-built; but she was so terribly mutilated that it is impossible to say anything more about her except one thing which may complicate matters still more." He paused a moment and looked from Mark to Madderson before adding, "She had had a child; not recently, but not, I should judge, much more than five years ago."

"If she were Borlase's wife and the child still alive . . ." Madderson said, leaving the sentence unfinished with a characteristic little gesture of his hands.

"Precisely," Heldar said.

But at the inquest Ferris did not, after all, put in his hypothesis that the woman was known to the baronet, might possibly have been his deserted wife, and was his murderer. Instead, after evidence of the finding of the two bodies and the medical evidence had been given, he asked for an adjournment until the results of enquiries then being made had been received. He added that in the matter of the woman's identity investigation had already established the fact that she had for the past ten days been staying at *The Norfolk Hotel*, Marine Parade, Yarmouth, in the name of Mrs. Robson.

The coroner, having congratulated Superintendent Ferris on the celerity and success of his enquiries, adjourned the inquest until Tuesday November the thirtieth.

## Chapter Thirteen

### THE TERROR

THE tragic death of the Larrikin Baronet tended to oust The Thing as the chief topic of discussion. There were brains in Seathorpe more astute than Superintendent Ferris's, and these, without the aid of the significant detail which had formed the basis of his hypothesis, came (jumped would perhaps be the better word) to the same conclusion; and to the Superintendent's annoyance (and momentary doubt of Dr. Heldar's discretion) the gossips of the town (the great majority of the adult population) were soon discussing the probabilities of the unknown woman's being Sir Jack's murderer; and thence, by an easy jump, to her being his discarded wife. The corollaries most favoured as topics were the chances of there being a family by this suppositional wife; and also of Lady Borlase's being pregnant. "Not, of course," said the more unctuous, "that she'd *be* Lady Borlase, the poor young thing."

What more than anything kept the Baronet's death in the forefront as a topic was the non-appearance night after night of The Thing. The patrols continued to go out (in fewer numbers, it is true, and with decreasing enthusiasm), but there was nothing to report, and not even so much as an alarm or a stray shot to liven the tedium of watching; so that a week after Sir Jack's death it began to seem a little silly to continue these stringent precautions, although windows were kept as tightly shut as they had been for weeks past.

And then a most extraordinary rumour began to buzz through the town. No one knew how it started. It seemed to be all over Seathorpe in a flash. Its birth was probably in some such casual remark as 'Funny The Thing hasn't shown up since the Larrikin Baronet died.' And that human quirk which delights in the grotesque and the preposterous did the rest. It was at first but a half-serious whisper, a mere egg: 'wonder if *he* had anything to do with The Thing?' But in no time it was a fully grown *canard* which, ignoring alike

facts, probabilities, and impossibilities, declared roundly: 'Gor! that's it; *stands to reason*.'

This incredible nonsense reached such proportions that some of the sillier heads began to waggle and shake and their owners to declare publicly that it would be an affront to God to accept the money of such a monster, and advocated the return of those generous gifts made by Sir Jack to mark his wedding-day. There is no suggestion, however wild, that will not find its advocates, and such advocacy is most vocal and likely to attract most supporters when it is a question of dealing with moneys over which the advocates have no control and in whose spending they have neither say nor interest. Support for this righteous indignation at the idea of (vicariously) handling tainted money grew hourly; grew alarmingly. It certainly alarmed a number of people; quite important people. It alarmed the governors of the Cottage Hospital. It alarmed the architects and builders with the Council in their pockets and the contracts as good as theirs for the new wing and the almshouses. Most of all it alarmed the Rev. Xavier Cunningham. And on Friday afternoon at his tea-table, there being also present Mrs. Cunningham, Sybil, and the Rev. Cyril, he allowed his temper to upset his digestion. "Of all the preposterous fandangle!" he snapped; "really it makes me despair of humanity."

"I shouldn't take it seriously," the Rev. Cyril remarked, a shade too lightly, and was snubbed with: "Perhaps you can afford not to take the loss of five thousand pounds seriously. I can't."

Sybil, distressed at her adored's discomfiture, hastened to his support, saying, "Isn't it only just a lot of silly gossip, Daddy?" to be herself snubbed with: "Silly gossip, as you are pleased in your ignorance to designate it, is capable, if not crushed, of starting an avalanche that may bring down an empire. I propose to crush it." Rather pleased with this rhetorical flourish, he allowed a milder note to creep into his voice as he added: "I shall deal with it from the pulpit on Sunday both at matins and evensong."

Mrs. Cunningham said: "Of course, dear; I am sure that is the best way of stopping it."

Sybil made a dutiful murmuring noise, while the Rev. Cyril

made no comment. It is a nice point who of the three sitting opposite him would have been the most astonished could they have read the thoughts passing through his mind: *Well, that gets me out of a sermon and is O.K. by me, you salivary old humbug.*

That Saturday's *Seathorpe Weekly Times* was notable for two letters and for Mervyn Clarke's comment upon them in his editorial. The first letter, signed 'Pro Bono Publico,' ran:

"SIR,

The dreadful and sinister events which have taken place in Seathorpe during the past months, and which I am convinced, despite the silly talk in the town, are by no means over, have one thing in common: no one has seen, definitely seen, the perpetrator. Scuttling noises have, it is alleged, been heard and dark, swiftly moving shapes glimpsed, and that is all. All the exertions of our police (and I am second to none in admiration of the town's constabulary) have failed to discover any *tangible cause of these outrages*. Surely, sir, the reason for this failure is plain: these evil deeds have been done by no natural agency. Students of the occult know beyond all cavil that evil spirits exist among us. These elementals, bestial creatures or emanations of ancient evil, are both visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, and it is held by some authorities that an elemental, or many of them, can assume such varying conditions at will. For example, an elemental can be visible and tangible, or visible and intangible, or tangible and invisible (the most horrifying of all), or intangible and invisible.

"I suggest, sir, that the only theory which will fit all the facts is that the alarming events which have happened since the early days of September have been the work of elementals. Well did poor little Tessie Mayhew call her attacker The Thing: out of the mouths of children are we taught, for there is no truer name for elementals than Things, Evil Things. And, sir, against such evil things human skill, human courage, human weapons, are vain. It is God, and God only, Who can help us; for of God and God alone are these Things in fear; and to God only are they vulnerable. God gives us a mighty weapon against these Evil Things. It is exorcism. A service of

exorcism should be held by Father Lampard and the vicar of St. John's jointly without delay.

"I am, sir,

"Your obedient servant."

The second letter ran :

"SIR,

Although there is happily a lull in the horrible attacks which have in the past weeks been made upon many of our townsfolk, no sensible person can believe that it is any more than a temporary lull, and such a lull is in fact characteristic of such attacks, as is well known to all students of crime and of those crimes especially which are the province of the alienist.

"To such students (and I confess myself one) it is daylight clear that all these acts are the work of a maniac, and in all probability a maniac of the type of the notorious Jack the Ripper. Much has been made of the tracks found on the sands and much also has been made of the fact that these tracks must have been made by creatures unknown to such eminent authorities as Mr. Prosper Fellowes and Mr. Austin Dauncey. But, Mr. Editor, the implication of that has surely been missed. Our justly eminent fellow-townsmen have failed to identify the tracks because they were not tracks at all. *They were the marks and scrapings made to obliterate the real tracks*, just as a fox's brush obliterates his tracks in the snow. Quite obviously the obliterated tracks were the marks of boots, a man's boots, a maniac's boots. There is, then, living amongst us a maniac, a dangerous maniac. He must be found. He must be sought out and discovered before he can commit further and, can it be doubted? viler outrages. No time must be lost.

"I am, sir,

"Yours very truly,

"A STUDENT OF CRIMINOLOGY."

Mr. Mervyn Clarke's editorial said: "We would call the attention of our readers to a letter in our correspondence columns signed 'Pro Bono Publico.' We neither associate our-

selves with the writer's belief in elementals nor deny the existence of such Evil Things: are there not more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in even the wisest men's philosophies? We wish rather to refer to what may well be a cognate matter: Possession.

"The fact of Possession cannot be controverted. It is one of the great and terrible truths of human existence. That men have been possessed by devils the whole of history bears evidence. Was not Nero possessed of a devil? Was not Caligula? Were not Martin Luther, John Huss, John Wyclif, Henry the Eighth, and Oliver Cromwell? It would be invidious to come down to our own times, and we will therefore stop at the ever-to-be-execrated names of Napoleon Bonaparte and Lord Salisbury. These men were all the victims, perhaps the willing, the co-operating victims, of Possession. Evil spirits, possibly the Father of Lies himself, possessed them. It must not be thought that women are not subject to Possession. Far from it. They are in all probability more liable to subjugation by Evil Spirits than are men. But as the place of women has hitherto been in the domestic rather than in the national and international spheres, her Possessions have not left their ugly mark upon the history of mankind, however many domestic tragedies they may have been responsible for.

"It is then a possibility, and we put it no stronger, that the distressing and alarming happenings which have recently disturbed the town are the result of Possession; that living in our midst, unguessed at by anyone, perhaps a man or woman of the utmost apparent respectability and worthiness, is a monster. A monster despite himself. An unfortunate wretched human being of whose body, and perhaps of whose soul, the Devil has taken possession.

"We do not know if, as suggested by our correspondent Pro Bono Publico, exorcism be sovereign against elementals; but we do know that it is the *only* weapon against Possession and that Holy Church lays down for our use the form and order of such a service. It is with all reverence and deference that we venture to remind Father Lampard that only he has, through God, the power to discover what unfortunate man or woman in our midst is Possessed by the Devil, and to exorcise that Devil.

"There is another letter in our columns to-day to which, in conclusion, we wish to call attention. It is signed 'A Student of Criminology.' We would remind the writer that a maniac has been defined as 'one possessed by a devil.'"

That Saturday afternoon all the Scouts and Cubs of the district were reviewed on the Common by the Scout Commissioner for the area, Sir Percy Foulkes. The review was followed by a march past, with the Earl of Frostenden taking the salute. Various displays were then given and badges and other honours awarded. The affair was an annual one and ended with songs and stories round the camp fires, after which each scout and cub pitched his own bivouac and a massed singing of *God Save the King* served as a fitting finale, with lights out half an hour later. There was to be a church parade at St. John's the following morning. It was not held.

Roll-call in the morning was at eight o'clock. A ten-year-old Cub, Sidney Brading, was absent. Someone was sent to look for him, and came back breathless to say he could not find Brading and he could not find his 'bivvy' either; but that there were 'a lot of funny marks in the grass where it had been.'

A search was immediately begun. The faint trail in the grass was followed to the road, where a portion of the bivouac was found. There was a track across the road: a track that might have been made by a body being dragged over the ground. The saltings were quartered, and presently similar tracks were found on the sands leading in a slightly zig-zag line into the sea. Another torn piece of bivouac was found on the sands and this was stained with blood.

The Thing was back again. It was with a renewed and increased sense of horror and terror that the town heard the news. The phrase 'into the sea' was repeated again and again. It seemed charged with a peculiar horror. Wherever The Thing and the presumed tragic death of little Sidney Brading were discussed that day the phrase intruded itself. It haunted people's minds and imaginations with a nightmare quality. There was something loathsomey dreadful in the idea of being seized and dragged into the sea. It started anew all manner of wild tales; it lent an ugly colour to the most far-fetched possibilities.

The church parade was cancelled; but never had St. John's held a larger, more breathlessly expectant congregation. It was felt that the vicar would refer to the tragedy from the pulpit; that he even might possess further information which, as was his habit, he would impart. The congregation was not disappointed in as far as the reference was concerned. The vicar preached a moving sermon on the text *Suffer little children to come unto me*. Little Sidney Brading was an only child, and the sermon was intended to comfort his parents. They were, however, not present; but the vicar's eloquence was not lost, as many wet eyes and hearts stirred to sincere compassion attested.

Some of the less imaginative among the congregation wondered at the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Brading. As they sat listening to the vicar's words of comfort, Fred Brading, a bricklayer by trade, was doggedly quartering the Common, the salttings, and the sands. He refused to believe his boy was dead. Again and again as his search went on the thought tried to invade his mind, but he thrust it out savagely, desperately.

And all along the sands from Seathorpe to Coveness, in little groups and parties, in solitary stragglers, men walked, watching the shallows ahead, their quest as lamentable but less hopeless than the stricken father's.

In the Bradings' cottage Mrs. Brading sat in the big arm-chair in the kitchen. She was asleep. Her face was tear-stained, dirty, blowzy. Beside her was an empty glass and three empty stout bottles. She was snoring. On the table the breakfast (untouched by either) had not been cleared away.

Everywhere in Seathorpe that day was being discussed and debated this Thing from the sea; for few now doubted that this obscene and horrifying monster striking terror throughout the town was a marine animal. Even Prosper Fellowes at *The Club* that evening, where he was one of a small group (itself one of many other small groups similarly engaged) debating the business, was inclined to be less dogmatic and to admit possibilities he would but a short time ago have derisively scouted. But that reasonableness was the general temper, and it extended to the point of tolerance towards even such extravagant hypotheses as Mervyn Clarke's Devil-Po-

sessed, Pro Bono Publico's *Elementals*, and *A Student of Criminology's Maniac*; although of the little group in question probably only Dauncey and Madderson would have admitted a mild credence in them. Fellowes, because of his romanticism, might have leant unwillingly towards accepting them; but decidedly Mark and Dr. Heldar were at one in dismissing them as medieval superstitions.

"I won't categorically deny that this damnable Thing comes out of the sea," Fellowes said; "but that is only moving the problem one step farther back. I can conceive of no marine animal likely to be found in these latitudes which could do what The Thing has done."

"Aren't you laying too much stress on latitude?" Mark asked; "it surely isn't impossible for animals to survive out of their native latitudes."

"Survive, yes, possibly; although not for long I should say, especially where the variation is as great as between tropical and temperate. From tropical to sub-tropical, yes; but not from tropical to temperate, although, as I say, I wouldn't entirely rule it out. But quite definitely the beast would not change its latitude of its own will. The question, then, is—How did it get here?"

"Wasn't there some years ago an invasion of these coasts by giant octopods with a number of people eaten?" Dauncey asked.

"First I've heard of it," Fellowes said.

Mark laughed. "Aren't you thinking of one of Wells's stories? A short story called, I believe, *The Sea Raiders*. That was about raids on the south coast of England by giant cephalopods, which, I take it, are octopuses, or octopods as Dauncey has it."

Madderson nodded, and said, "Yes; a grand yarn"; and Fellowes said, "I remember it now; very well done; Wells never fluffs the scientific part of his tales. But it was, of course, just a story, an imaginative essay; it couldn't have happened; the giant cephalopods could not tolerate the temperature of the water round our coasts."

"Is that certain?" Madderson asked; and Heldar said with a smile: "There's the Loch Ness Monster, you know, Fellowes; he tolerates Scotland."

"Is that a reference to the climate or the inhabitants?" Dauncey asked, with a grin.

"Both," Heldar smiled; and Fellowes said: "We won't drag in the Loch Ness Monster. I refuse to be involved in any argument about it, but I'm convinced the whole thing is a *canard*. Of course something has been seen. There's always something seen. No imagination can create something out of nothing. There must be a nucleus of fact, however minute. The nucleus in the Loch Ness Monster was probably a floating tree half waterlogged; or a large eel seen through the bottom of a bottle of whisky. But this devilish Thing which is haunting Seathorpe is not an octopus or anything like it. Octopuses cannot live out of water. It would be as sensible to say that a giant mackerel came out of the sea and bore off young Brading, to say nothing of the other attacks. No. I'm more inclined now, I admit, to postulate a marine creature; but that is as far as I will go or," with a shrug, "can get."

"Quite," Dauncey said; "as professional men we're bound to be cautious and leave flights of fancy to those who like 'em." He laughed. "I had to run over to old Tenter's place at Eyebridge this afternoon. He is, you'll admit, a typical Norfolk farmer: hard-headed, close-fisted, honest, obstinate, uncouth, matter-of-fact. And he'd got hold of the most preposterous rubbish from somewhere and had swallowed it whole without a gag. And could talk of nothing else. He *knew*; and he wasn't going to keep it to himself. He declared that this country was about to be invaded from the sea by Things in hundreds, in thousands, hundreds of thousands. He'd the whole thing off pat. He said the early visitations were merely the scouts; that these creatures (for there's more than one according to him) which attacked Jaunty Muir and Tessie Mayhew, and have now killed poor little Brading, are the first waves of the invasion; and that presently the second and following waves will come in their hundreds of thousands, and the Things will swarm over the country thrusting great claws through windows and pulling us out of our beds like winkles out of their shells. He blethered out this farrago with perfect seriousness, which I matched with mine, even going so far as to say to his final 'Don't you agree, Mr. Dauncey?' 'It wouldn't surprise me, Mr. Tenter, if you haven't hit the nail on the head.'"

Dauncey smiled. "Can't afford to offend old Tenter. He's worth a good hundred a year to me."

"Is it any greater bosh than Mervyn Clarke's devils and Pro Bono Publico's elementals?" Mark laughed.

"But isn't there something in Possession? and elementals too for that matter?" Madderson said.

"People *are* possessed," Mark said; "but not by devils; by human nature at its worst; or shall we say its least attractive? As for elementals, it boils down to—Do you believe in the supernatural or not? I don't."

"But," Dauncey said; "things do happen which defy a natural explanation."

"Of course. Once an eclipse of the sun or moon defied a natural explanation. Hence the old myths."

"H'm. Well, I wish someone would supply a natural explanation for this damnable Thing. But perhaps you have one?"

"No. But there is one. That's certain."

The Terror was back again more hauntingly than before. The armed patrols were renewed; there was no lack of volunteers, the supply being limited only because so many wives flatly refused to be left at home unprotected while their husbands were 'out enjoying themselves.' There were, indeed, considerable grounds for that wifely phrase. The men were in no small measure enjoying it. They were living over again that excitement and fellowship experienced as boys in orchard robbing and other nocturnal expeditions; and to many it was a revival of the pleasanter side of their war service; and the very real spice of danger present added to their enjoyment, especially when the patrol was over for the night. Neither Dr. Heddar, old Dr. Sharples, nor young Dr. Mead joined any of these patrols; they were too busily engaged in fighting the influenza epidemic, which now shared with The Terror its grip upon the town.

On Tuesday evening Mark called round at Ferris's house, ostensibly to borrow *The Trial of Robert Wood*, but really to see how the Superintendent was taking the situation. Ferris took him up to his tiny 'den,' and having helped him to a whisky-and-soda and poured out one for himself sat down on the sofa and put up his legs. "I don't remember being so tired

since I was in the Army," he said; and as Mark gave him a glance of enquiry, he went on, "and all to no purpose. I'm completely baffled. I give it up. I'm half inclined to ask the Yard for assistance, but I hate to do it." He smiled grimly. "That's my inferiority complex, of course; due to my father's having been a bricklayer and my being educated at an elementary school. The plebeian complex. A curse on it. If ever I turn communist it will be because of my being kicked out to work at fourteen just when I was beginning to be really interested in study. Talking of bricklayers, I'd an unpleasant quarter of an hour yesterday afternoon and a more unpleasant one still this morning. I was just coming home to tea yesterday when Brading came to the Station, asked to see me, and was shown in to my office.

"I don't know if you've seen him since Saturday, but he's changed almost out of recognition. I really mean that literally. He's a big burly chap, red-faced and bull-necked. Or was. He doesn't look much more than half his size now and his face is almost haggard.

"It was pathetic the way he sat there twisting and turning his cap in his hands (he'd come straight from work) and not knowing how to put what he wanted to say, but desperately determined to say it. At last he got it out; or some of it. 'Is everything being done, sir?' he asked; 'everything? my boy ain't dead; I know it; I swear he ain't.'

"'Everything is being done, Mr. Brading,' I said; 'and is still being done. Everything.'

"'He ain't dead,' he repeated; 'I tell you he ain't dead. He's laying there somewheres. I've searched everywheres day an' night. I ain't been to bed since—since Friday night. I tell you he's alive. I know it. He's alive.' The tears began to run down his cheeks and his mouth to contort spasmodically, but he did not heed this and went on, his voice now broken and hoarse: 'I can't bear it. I tell you he's alive. He's all I got. We wasn't like father and son. We went everywheres together. We was pals. Mates. He must be somewheres out there.'

"I did what I could to comfort him, and presently he went. I felt limp. Scenes like that drain me. The spirit goes out of me. I suppose I wasn't cut out for a policeman." He turned and reached out a hand to a bookcase behind his head and

took out a small blue-covered volume. "Madderson passed on to me your *Letters of Robert Southey*."

Mark nodded: "I told him to."

"I was reading it last night just before I turned in, well after midnight. And I came across a letter Southey wrote shortly after the death of his ten-year-old son Herbert. It was written to Grosvenor Bedford, and I thought it something of a coincidence that only that afternoon I'd had to listen to a similar cry from the heart. Do you remember this passage: 'Never, perhaps, was child of ten years old so much to his father. Without ever ceasing to treat him as a child, I had made him my companion, as well as playmate and pupil, and he had learnt to interest himself in my pursuits, and take part in all my enjoyment'? The previous day he had written to Bedford: 'Oh! that I may be able to leave this country! the wound will never close while I remain in it.'"

Mark nodded almost absently, and Ferris, closing the book, went on: "It didn't move me, you know. Southey's weighed and measured words of grief lacked the poignancy of poor Brading's: 'He's all I got. We wasn't like father and son. We went everywheres together. We was pals. Mates. He must be somewhere's out there.'"

"Yes," Mark said; "that's the curse of being a writer. Old Brember (read anything of his? *Hilltop House* is his best)—he came into *The Courier* office one morning and ambled (he was too fat to walk) into my room to see me. His wife had recently died, and to my embarrassment he insisted on telling me about her last hours and he was crying as he told me. And then he wiped his eyes and blew his nose and said to me: 'And while I was sitting by her bed watching her die, my dear boy, my abominable mind was busy coining phrases to be used in letters to friends and relatives acquainting them of my loss. And it *was* a loss, my dear boy, I assure you. A loss I shall never get over and one I pray God I shan't long survive.' I believe that he was speaking the truth, liar as the old man was, as we all are, writers most of all. He did in fact die before the year was out."

"Is he worth reading?"

"Well, hardly. *Hilltop House* perhaps. But who beyond half a dozen or so are? We're a poor lot these days."

Ferris laughed. "I thought Brember was an old man. Hardly one of your contemporaries, anyway."

"In the sixties. But by these days I meant since the beginning of the century. Compare the first thirty-seven years of this century with the first thirty-seven of last century; or even the last thirty-seven of it. We make a pretty poor show in comparison."

"We think so. But perhaps we're a bit too near."

"Flattering explanation, but, I believe, false. But you said you'd had two unpleasant quarters of an hour. What was the second?"

"It was this morning. Mrs. Brading came to see me just after eleven. She'd evidently had a drink or two before coming and her breath was rank. She'd called to ask me about the insurance money on the boy. Wanted to know when she could draw it. Said they were in a bad way for money and wanted it for mourning and for the funeral. It was rather poisonous. I told her that I didn't think she could draw the insurance money yet, and that the Company was quite right in refusing to presume the boy's death; but that I wasn't an authority and suggested she should call to see the Town Clerk. And at last I got rid of her. But I couldn't get her out of my mind for a long while. She explained poor Brading's 'He's all I got.' Christ! how human beings hurt one another!" He sat up and grimaced. "That's a dam' silly remark for a policeman. Let's have another drink."

The next issue of *The Seathorpe Weekly Times* contained a short leader in which the editor wrote: "We have received a large number of letters, a selection of which we print on page 4, commenting upon our recent suggestion that in Possession will be found the solution of the mystery which is so profoundly and distressingly affecting the lives of us all. Readers will notice that these letters are in the main derisory, destructive: not one constructive. To the writers of these letters, and to all our readers who may hold similar opinions, we ask: what other explanation so fits the facts? If there be another we have not heard of it.

"We cannot leave the subject of this frightening visitation without reminding our readers that it will soon be three months since these inexplicable events began. We are second

to none in our respect for the local constabulary and in our admiration of its skill, sagacity, and courage; but we should be failing in our duty to the community if we did not remind those in authority in the Force that one of the most important functions of Scotland Yard is to give expert advice and assistance, and that there is nothing derogatory in asking for such assistance."

One of the few dwelling-houses in Seathorpe which still kept its windows open day and night was Dr. Heldar's bungalow. Mark kept his own bedroom window open, but because of the apprehension of Mrs. Paradock and the maids he allowed all other windows to be fastened at night, and Mrs. Paradock made it her business to see this was done before she went to bed. Madderson quite frankly said he preferred to risk influenza to his bedroom being invaded by *The Thing*; and kept all his windows closed. He said further that he did not believe closed windows had any connection with influenza; that it was all a medical stunt; and to support his case he declared that during the war when the men were sleeping in nice warm, airless dugouts they never caught cold, but as soon as the warm weather began and they started to sleep in the open and wallow in fresh air all night long, influenza epidemics began; and he instanced the Spanish influenza epidemic of June 1918 which laid low the whole French and British armies and would have lost us the war had not the Boche also been laid low. Dr. Heldar smilingly refused the challenge, but said that whatever the pros and cons might be of fresh air he had always preached it to Seathorpe, and he must continue to practise what he preached, if every finny inhabitant of the deep, or the devil himself, threatened his open windows. He admitted that he did this not without some uneasiness.

It may be assumed that Mrs. Heldar agreed with her husband; and she certainly shared, and to an enhanced degree, his uneasiness. Nothing, however, happened to justify this feeling until the night of Saturday, November 27, when they were woken by strange noises in the garden, which ceased when Dr. Heldar, despite his wife's protests, went out to investigate; but began again shortly after he had returned. After a time, however, they ceased altogether, and Dr. Heldar-

was quickly asleep again. But not Mrs. Heldar. She slept no more that night, and was glad to fall in with her husband's suggestion that she should sleep the next night in Lesley's room and keep their windows closed.

Dr. Heldar that night put a large torch under his pillow and, with a half-smile at the precaution, a fully loaded service revolver. He was woken shortly after two in the morning by a loud noise at the open window. The room was in utter darkness, even the window invisible. He groped for his torch, and in his haste thrust it from under the pillow and heard it go rolling away over the floor. And as it did so there was a heavy bump on the floor (a bump that had in it something of a rattling and clashing) and then utter silence. He carefully felt for his revolver, gripped it, and moved away from the bed. A faint unpleasant smell drifted over to him. It was an unfamiliar smell with a sickly, fetid quality. The room remained intensely dark. Something began to move towards him with a heavy scuttling sound. He raised his revolver and then abruptly realised that he was not certain of his position in the room, and that until he was he dared not fire, for his wife and Lesley were in the next room and the dividing wall was but lath and plaster.

The scuttling sound stopped. The fetid smell increased. He seemed with every breath to be drawing poison into his lungs. He moved softly a few paces and stumbled over a chair. The scuttling noise began again. He thought he felt something touch him. There was silence again, and the first wave of panic began to lap at his mind. And suddenly, very faintly in the darkness, there loomed the shape of the open window. Once more the scuttling noise began. It seemed to be almost on top of him. An irresistible urge to get out of the room overcame him, and he made a wild rush for the window, climbed through, dropped and ran. In his panic he forgot to close it behind him.

He presently stole back and saw his wife's and Lesley's white shapes at their window. He signalled to them to let him in, and, once in, closed the window quickly, snicked the catch, and having hurriedly explained went into the hall to ring up the police.

When he returned to Lesley's room everything was quiet;

and then, quite plainly and as loud as it had sounded when he was in the room with it, there came that ugly scuttling noise. "I am going to fire through the wall," he said; "it will make the devil of a racket; put your hands over your ears." He fired, and then shifted his aim and fired again and then again. The noise in the next room increased; there were rending and tearing and crashing noises. He fired again and then twice more. The noise in the next room rose to a shattering pitch, to a sort of clangour. There was a splintering sound, the smashing of glass, and silence. Heldar switched on the light and ran to the window. The light from the room shone over the garden. Across the lawn scuttled at great speed a dark, squat shape. He flung up the window, raised his revolver and pulled the trigger; and as the hammer clicked on the empty chamber he cursed and hurled the weapon at the vanished Thing. He turned away from the window and found himself shaking uncontrollably.

There were voices in the garden. He went to the window again and hailed them. It was Mark and Madderson, who had been woken by the firing, had come pounding over the field, and were now breathlessly asking what was amiss.

He slipped on a dressing-gown and let them in.

"Everybody all right?" Mark asked; "is Les——" he broke off as Heldar said quickly, his voice strangely different from its customary slow, smooth urbanity: "It's all right now. Come into my study and I'll join you when everyone's settled down. If you feel like a drink or cigarettes at this hour, help yourselves. I want both myself, badly."

Heldar had but just returned to his study when the police car arrived, and he said, "If that's Ferris I'll bring him in for a drink." It was, however, Sergeant Rice and Constable Bamfield, who first searched the gardens and then came back to inspect Heldar's bedroom. Several chairs were upset and two of them smashed into pieces. Mrs. Heldar's dressing-table had been overturned and the looking-glass broken and scattered. The bedside table was upside down with its books over the floor. Most of the bedding, torn and rent, was distributed about the room. The air still faintly held a fetid smell. "Fair shambles," commented Sergeant Rice; "how many shots did you fire, sir?"

"Six, and apparently missed with every one."

Rice nodded. "You certainly don't seem to have hit it, sir." He went down on his knees, examining the carpet closely, and then put his face down and sniffed. "Smells a bit strong," he said; "queer sort of stink. I can't just place it. What d'you make of it, Bamfield?"

The constable obediently knelt, sniffed, considered, and then said slowly: "Well, I don't know; sort of—sort of—musty, p'raps; no, seaweedy: rank seaweed."

"H'm," the sergeant said; "now you say so, perhaps it is," and he made a note in his pocket-book. After he had asked Heldar a few questions they went off, having accepted a cigarette, but refusing a drink.

Heldar, Madderson, and Mark went back to the study, and Mark said, "Did you notice his 'fair shambles'? Every mess in any shape or form is a shambles these days, and the correct use is already lost beyond recapturing. It's a pity. It robs us of a very vivid and precise word."

As they sat down Madderson said to Heldar: "Did you get any real impression of The Thing?"

"Not very definite," Heldar said; "but if I had to describe it I should say it was like some gigantic crab, allowing for the size things look in the dark."

Madderson nodded. "That was my impression too."

"Your impression!" Heldar and Mark exclaimed.

"Yes. As we were pelting across the field I thought I saw a great dark shape scuttling away at tremendous speed. It was only a glimpse and it was gone. But now you say crab—well, by Gad! that's exactly what the dam' thing was like: a monstrous crab."

"Did you notice which way it was going?" Heldar asked.

Madderson nodded. "It was making straight for the sea."

## *Chapter Fourteen*

### JOURNAL OF LUTHER ESENHIGH

IT was eleven o'clock in the morning of Monday, November the twenty-ninth. The day was heavy, the sky overcast. Thunder rumbled remotely. The adjourned inquest on Sir Jack Borlase was being held the next day, and Superintendent Ferris in his office was discussing that and other matters with Inspector Blake. Information had now been received from Australia. The Larrikin Baronet had lived with the woman for some years in Sydney, but they had not been married. They were known as Mr. and Mrs. Stanton. There had been a child, but it had died in infancy. The woman had afterwards left him and gone to Brisbane, where she became a prostitute. After Stanton came to England to claim the Borlase title and estates the woman gave up her street life, assumed the name of Mrs. Brabazon, and lived in a hotel the life of a woman of independent means on a generous allowance made to her through Sir Jack's solicitors. It was this generosity which cost the baronet his life: the woman, her greed excited by what she was already getting, had obviously come to England to extort a larger allowance or perhaps to insist on his marrying her.

Ferris went over these points with Blake and concluded: "So all's well that ends well, as far as Lady Borlase is concerned. It might have been so much worse. Sir Jack made no will, and if that woman had been his wife there wouldn't have been a penny-piece for Amy. If her baby's a boy everything will be shipshape. She'll probably marry again. Thunder seems to be getting nearer."

"And if it's a girl?"

"She'll be heiress to the estate, but of course the title will lapse." He smiled. "This always appears to me a legitimate feminine grievance; but it's one women seem indifferent about. Odd, seeing how keen they are on titles."

"Are we going to do anything about Scotland Yard and this other business?" Blake asked.

"No. I'd as soon ask Father Lampard to exorcise Clarke's

devils. We're on the verge of running The Thing to earth. In fact, Heldar was within an ace of killing one last night." And he related the incident, referring now and again to Sergeant Rice's report, which lay on his desk.

"If he *had* killed it," Blake said, "would that get us very much farther?"

"A great deal, I should say. We should know what they were, and that would probably give us a pointer to their place of origin and suggest the best defence against them. Or rather the best attack."

"Do you think there's anything in these tales of their being primitive sea monsters?"

"No. If they were the attacks would be spread all along the coast and not confined to Seathorpe. That thunder's certainly getting nearer." The telephone bell rang, and he took off the receiver and said: "Seathorpe Police Station; Superintendent Ferris speaking." Blake watched his face, but its impassivity did not change. Presently Ferris said: "We'll be over at once. Who is that playing an organ?" Blake saw his face change then, and as Ferris said, "All right! we're coming right away," and replaced the receiver, he asked, "What's amiss?"

"It's a call from *Bevis Hall* from Essenhigh's man Jackson. He says his master's been locked in his laboratory——"

"Laboratory!" Blake exclaimed.

"That was what he said. For the past twelve hours; since ten o'clock last night, in fact; and he can get no answer to his knocks. We'd better go over at once. We'll take Dean with us. By the way, while I was listening did you hear any music coming over?"

"Yes. Quite loud."

"What did you make of it?"

"I thought, like you did, that someone was playing the organ. What did Jackson say?"

Ferris stroked his chin. "He made an extremely odd answer to my question." He paused and rose from his chair, pushing it back. "He said it was devil's music. He sounded half hysterical. We'd better go over right away."

They left Constable Dean in the car and walked up the short drive to the great portal of the Hall; but before they reached the door it was hurriedly opened and Jackson came

out to meet them. There was a strained, tense look about him and his voice was pitched a shade high as he began to talk in a quick, rather breathless voice, his glance darting nervously from one to the other. From the open door as they approached came the strains of music, as if some great organ were being played, but without those boomings and reverberations which render the organ distressing to a sensitive ear. There was a rumble of thunder and the music seemed to swell with it.

"Who's playing?" Ferris asked as they entered.

"No one," Jackson said. He put one hand to his mouth and nibbled at his nails: "it's devil's music."

"But where does it come from?" Blake asked. "Can't you show us?"

"I can show you some," Jackson said reluctantly, almost morosely. "There isn't much playing this morning besides the big harp and one or two of the little rods. There's one in here," opening the door of a large barely but pleasantly furnished sitting-room.

As they entered they were met by a faint, sweet sound something like that of a muted fiddle. It came from a metal rod about three feet high on an ebonite stand under an open window.

"I see you keep your windows open here at any rate," Blake said.

"All windows are kept open here day and night," Jackson said. "That's a melodic rod, so Mr. Essenhight calls it. There are bigger ones in other rooms, and some of them have wireless valves attached to them. But they're nothing to the big harp. That's what you can hear playing now. When they're *all* playing it gives you the fair horrors. Well, it does me, although Mr. Essenhight don't seem to notice it. They're always worst when there's thunder about, so I suppose they've got something to do with electricity, but"—he paused an instant and shot his listeners an almost shifty glance—"I call them the devil's music, and that's what they are. Hark at it!" as they approached a door at the end of a passage they were now traversing. He turned the handle and pushed the door open and the music came flooding and pouring out, beating about them with the effect almost of a great wind. Facing them under a window was a large harp-shaped frame about

six feet high. Metal rods of varying height and thickness took the place of strings, and clustered about its foot were groups of red-and-blue rectangular metal boxes. "There's valves in them," Jackson said, "I've seen him replace them." He paused a moment and then added: "he don't tell me much."

"Can't you stop it?" Ferris said; "it seems a bit overpowering."

"I can't," Jackson said, and repeated, as if by design: "he don't tell me much. He don't seem to hear things," he added, after another pause; "sometimes they're all going day and night fit to wake the dead."

"Where's the laboratory?" Ferris asked.

"I'm taking you there. It's a big place on the ground floor right at the end of the east wing. I've never been inside."

"And Mr. Essenhig's been there since ten last night?"

"That's right. And I can't make him hear."

"Has he ever done that before? I mean shut himself in for so long and taken no notice of your knocking?"

"No, or I shouldn't have rung you up. He's often been in after midnight. Fact is he's in all hours of the day and night, but never for more'n three or four hours at a stretch. Nothing like this."

"What work is he doing?"

"I don't know. Devil's work. I've never been in."

"What do you mean by Devil's work?"

"I mean what I say. I've seen things and I've heard things, and I know what's been going on everywhere."

"What d'you mean by everywhere? In the house here?"

"I mean in Seathorpe. This is the laboratory."

Ferris knocked on the door. "A steel door," he said; "is it thick?"

"I don't know; never noticed. It's a combination lock, but I don't know the combination. He never told me much. Hardly spoke to me at all for days together. And he never let me into the laboratory. Not that I wanted to go."

"So you've never been inside?"

"Never crossed the threshold."

"But you've some idea of the sort of work Mr. Essenhig was engaged on?"

"It was Devil's work. That's enough for me."

"It's a five-letter combination," Blake said; "we might try it till doomsday. Wonder how long a locksmith would take. Shall I send Dean for Webb?"

Ferris smiled. "Webb sells locks, but I shouldn't call him a locksmith; merely an ironmonger. We'll break the lock. I brought my Webley along for the purpose. But we'll try knocking again first."

For the next few minutes they knocked loudly and repeatedly without any result, and then Ferris drew his revolver and fired at the lock.

"Good Lord!" Blake said; "we've forgotten the windows. Didn't you say they were always open, Jackson? And in any case we can break them."

"Well, they are and they aren't," Jackson said, again giving them that almost shifty glance. "And when they're not open they've steel shutters inside. And they're down now."

"How do you know?"

"I tried to get in that way."

"I see." Ferris put his shoulder to the door, but it did not budge. "Are there bolts?" he asked Jackson.

"Don't know. I've never been inside."

"If there are we'll probably have to get Webb after all. We'll try another shot. He fired, and then again, and this time when he put his weight against the door it swung slowly inwards and he entered, Blake closely following him, while Jackson remained outside.

The laboratory was about eighty feet long by fifty wide and twenty high, and it was brilliantly, dazzlingly lit. On the floor were several metal tanks varying from the size of an ordinary bath to the dimensions of a large cistern. One at the far end, and the largest, was roughly about fifteen feet long by ten broad and standing four feet high. Ranged along the walls and occupying a good deal of space between the tanks were many electrical machines and devices, a few of which (a small van de Graaf, a Wimshurst, and a Roscoe-Thompson) were familiar to Ferris; but the majority were not only strange, but of such grotesque construction and, indeed, menacing appearance that they seemed to have been modelled from the fantastic designs of some mad artist.

From these extraordinary machines wires led to all the

tanks, and the large tank at the end of the laboratory was in particular festooned with insulated wires of varying thickness. Over this great tank was an array of red, blue, and green electric bulbs in series of four and six. Lying at the bottom of the tank in about eighteen inches of water was the body of Luther Essenhigh.

Before Ferris realised what he was doing Inspector Blake leaned over the side of the tank and put his hands into the water to grasp the dead man. Without a cry, without a single groan, but with a great shudder that shook him from head to foot, his body slumped over the edge of the tank. The legs twitched once or twice spasmodically and then there was no further movement. As Ferris stared in horror at his dead colleague he was aware of a faintly fetid smell in the air.

He ran back to the door and called out to Jackson: "Do you know where all the switches are?"

"I don't know nothing about them," Jackson said; and then repeated his monotonous "I've never been in there."

"Come and give me a hand."

"I'm not coming in there," his glance going quickly to Ferris's face and away again, his mouth shut in an obstinate line.

Ferris shrugged his shoulders. "Go out to the car and tell Constable Dean to fetch Sergeant Rice, Constable Bamfield and Dr. Heldar. If the doctor is out leave a message; just a moment," writing in his notebook and tearing out the page. "Give this to Mrs. Heldar if the doctor is out. Tell Constable Dean to lose no time." When Jackson had gone Ferris re-entered the laboratory and was walking slowly towards the end when his attention was arrested by a faint click. He retraced his footsteps and there was another faint click. He turned and again walked slowly away from the door and the click was repeated. He stood still for a long moment in thought, and presently nodded his head and continued on down the laboratory until he came to the big tank in which lay Essenhigh's body. He was aware again of a faint fetid smell, and now heard, or noticed for the first time, a subdued regular half-humming, half-beating noise. There were numerous switches about the tank, some in the off and others in the on position. He meditated moving them,

but decided to wait till Bamfield, a skilled electrical engineer, arrived. A thought struck him and he hurried out of the laboratory calling to Jackson, who had just returned: "I want to telephone."

"There's one in the laboratory."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"I'm in a hurry."

"There's one in through there," pointing.

Ferris rang up the Station and found Dean had just arrived and Bamfield and Rice were about to start. Dr. Heldar, they said, was already on his way in his own car. "Bring your camera and plenty of film and a sketch-book," Ferris told Rice.

He had barely finished his instructions when Dr. Heldar arrived, and a few minutes later Sergeant Rice and Constable Bamfield were there. The four made their way to the laboratory, Jackson bringing up the rear, sullen, shooting nervous glances about him, biting at his nails.

As they entered Ferris listened for the faint click and heard it; but it was apparently unnoticed by the others. But only apparently, as far as Constable Bamfield was concerned, for as they walked slowly down the laboratory he came alongside Ferris and said something softly, to which Ferris nodded and said, "I think that's probably what it is. No. Leave it for the present."

As they neared the big tank Bamfield was staring all about him in blank astonishment and considerable excitement. He nodded towards a pair of the more fantastic electrical machines. "Never seen anything like them," he said; "didn't know there were such things." He made a sweep with his hand: "They're nearly all new to me."

"Any connection with the music, do you think?" Ferris asked. It was necessary to listen, for the swelling flood which had buffeted him and Blake on their arrival had now died away to a low murmuring that had something of the quality of the strains of an æolian harp.

"Shouldn't think so, sir," Bamfield said.

They had by now reached the big tank and stood looking down at the dead man, a small crumpled figure just covered

by the water. Surrounded by those grotesque menacing machines, it might have been a sacrificial victim to the mechanical gods of some hideous inhuman religion.

Ferris spoke to Bamfield, and the constable was walking round the tank when Ferris said suddenly, "O wait a moment, Bamfield!" and instructed Sergeant Rice to take a half-dozen photographs of the tank from different angles and then to photograph all the apparatus in the laboratory, but to touch nothing until Bamfield had given the O.K. And at Ferris's word the constable then moved slowly round the tank, methodically turning off switches and disconnecting wires with the engaging unconcern of the expert. "O.K. now, sir," he said; "I'll go all round with Sergeant Rice now. And the door, sir?" looking at Ferris enquiringly.

"Leave it for now. I've not decided about it."

And as Bamfield walked over to join the sergeant, Ferris, with Dr. Heldar's assistance, removed Inspector Blake's limp body and laid it on the floor; and then, lifting out Essenhigh's, placed it beside it.

Heldar made a brief examination of Essenhigh. "He wasn't drowned," he said.

"So I gathered. What killed poor Blake killed him. Any idea how long he has been dead?"

"You'll have to wait for that. I could do a P.M. this afternoon."

"Both?"

"It won't be necessary with Blake. How did it happen, poor fellow?" And when Ferris had told him he said, nodding his head, "And he'd probably during his time in the Force given evidence at a dozen inquests on similar cases."

"Yes," Ferris said, "and wondered how people could be such fools. The instinct works quicker than the reason. I suppose that's a plausible explanation."

Before the party finally left Ferris asked to be taken to Mr. Essenhigh's study, and there he took possession of a great quantity of material: typescripts; manuscripts; many notebooks of varying sizes; several sketch-books and a large number of unmounted photographs. Many of these photographs consisted of long coiled strips, and there were also many long coiled strips of negative. These Ferris regarded with a faint

smile, and then, taking Bamfield aside, whispered to him for a few minutes, and the constable withdrew. The rest of the party had been waiting in the cars outside nearly ten minutes before Bamfield came out, and during that time Ferris had held Jackson in conversation by the police car.

There were two sensations for the town the following day. At the inquest on Luther Essenhigh Superintendent Ferris asked for an adjournment until Friday, when he hoped, he said, to be able to tell the full story; and he added that preliminary investigations enabled him to state with complete assurance that the Terror which had so long haunted Seathorpe was ended.

Within an hour of the inquest's adjournment Ferris's sensational announcement was everywhere being discussed. But before evening there was an even more fruitful topic for the gossips: Essenhigh's manservant Jackson had been arrested, and at the resumed inquest would be charged on the coroner's warrant with murder.

Late that evening Ferris called on Dr. Heldar, and presently a message was sent to Mark asking him to join them in the doctor's study, where they were closeted until the early hours of the morning, Ferris leaving at one, Mark not until after three.

The inquest was to be resumed on Friday, and on the previous evening there sat down to an early dinner at the Heldars' the Doctor, Mrs. Heldar, and Lesley; Mr. and Mrs. Madderson and Alison; and Mark. After dinner they sat round the big log fire in the lounge and drank their coffee, and then Dr. Heldar, perhaps a trifle self-consciously, said: "Superintendent Ferris, Mr. Passmore, and I have spent much of the last forty-eight hours in preparing a long statement which Ferris will read at the inquest to-morrow. It is a very long statement, in fact, but I venture to think it will be found interesting, to put it cautiously. It has been compiled from a journal kept by the late Luther Essenhigh and from numerous other papers and documents found in his desk. Mr. Passmore as a practised writer was asked by Ferris to put the whole of the material into a connected narrative, and this he consented to do, with what excellent result you will hear. He has also very kindly consented to read it, after," with a smile,

"vainly trying to persuade me to do so. I think we ought to be grateful to Ferris for so relying upon our discretion and thus giving us what I may call a pre-hearing of this astonishing narrative. My sole regret is that Dick and Sam are not here to listen." He smiled again and, leaning back in his chair and taking out his pipe and tobacco, said: "I'll now leave it to Mr. Passmore."

Mark opened a large envelope which he had brought into the room with him, and took out a sheaf of closely typed papers and a number of photographs and drawings. "Mr. Essenhigh's Journal was, of course, written in the first person," he said, "and so as to keep the personal flavour I have used the first person throughout the narrative, except for a longish digression upon the work of Andrew Crosse, who, exactly one hundred years ago almost to the month, was performing his incredible experiments; incredible but incontestably true; and vouched for by many Fellows of the Royal Society who witnessed them. But we will come to Andrew Crosse in his place in the Journal. As I say, to keep the personal note of Essenhigh's entries I have used the first person; and to add as much as possible of the real man, of his essential self, I have retained all that was feasible of his own composition, with its turgidity, its flamboyance, its arrogance, its quite wild and unbalanced quality, which at times, and I think Dr. Heldar agrees," looking over to Heldar, "verges upon paranoia."

Dr. Heldar nodded: "An understatement if anything."

"There are," Mark went on, "several photographs and a few drawings which I will pass round in their proper place: to show them now would be merely confusing and mystifying. I have, by the by, omitted all chemical formulæ and all descriptions of intricate electrical experiments. I think that's all." He flattened out the typescript and said: "This, then, is Luther Essenhigh's own story, told as nearly as possible in his own words."

#### LUTHER ESSENHIGH'S STORY

I was born on June 18, 1891, at Stratford-on-Avon. My father, a very wealthy man, was a doctor, but he did not practise. I do not think he had practised more than a few years

after getting his diploma, but I do not know, for he never discussed his life with me and I stood always in too much awe of him to ask. I was an only child, and my mother had died when I was two. We had a big house with a garden running down to the river, and there was a large staff of servants. My father lived the life of a recluse. He was supposed to be devoting himself to study, but what that study was I never knew. His health was not good and he was probably very lonely and unhappy. In appearance he was tall, thin, stooping, with a haggard face, beaky nose, and tremendously bushy eyebrows. In my earliest recollections of him his hair had already receded from his forehead as far as his crown, and I never looked upon him as anything else but an old man. He had a way of walking with his hands clasped behind his back, his body and head bent forward; and he frequently talked or muttered to himself. Altogether, a rather frightening companion for a small boy. And he did in fact frighten me.

I was ill-treated and wronged by my life with him, those first fourteen years of my existence. There was no bodily cruelty; he never once beat me or even slapped me; such an act was impossible to him; he would have considered it degrading. Perhaps I should be grateful to him for that, for I was very sensitive to pain and did everything I could to avoid it. I was well fed, well looked after, and carefully taught by a succession of governesses, and later tutors, until I was fourteen. What money could buy I had and without stint. But he gave me no affection and I had no mother.

I was as lonely and unhappy as he; more unhappy indeed, for there is a poignancy in young sorrow that the adult is no longer able to feel. Only a fool makes light of children's sorrows because they are transient. Nor are they always even transient, for their effects may remain throughout life. Of all the things a child needs for a healthy life I would put love first; for the rickety body that tells of a lack of vital foods is a less bitter burden than the starved spirit and warped soul.

But the human being denied love will seek his compensations. I found mine in the brute creation: in dogs, cats, and ponies, but also, stretching a wider net, in hedgehogs, squirrels, rabbits, wild birds of all sorts, and once for several months a young otter. I was passionately fond of all these

creatures and the death or disappearance of one of them overwhelmed me with grief, filled me with a gnawing sorrow that in my youngest years could find relief in tears, but which later, for fear of my father's contempt, I endured in dry-eyed stoical misery. And for this lavishing of my love these creatures, little and big, gave me in return what they had to give. It was not a great deal. One cannot get more out of a bag than is in it. They could give me their liking and their trust. They could not give me what only another human being could give.

Yet they were a substitute and a good one: and how many bad ones might there not have been! And they gave me another interest too, drove me to it indeed: that of reading for pleasure, for utter enjoyment. For as men and women in love turn instinctively to poetry and music which has been inspired by love, so I, in love with the brute creation, turned for my reading to books about them; and before I was twelve I had read all of Audubon, of Thoreau, of Gilbert White, of Richard Jefferies, all the volumes of J. G. Wood (and there must have been dozens of them), and innumerable popular compilations and illustrated gift books whose titles and authors I have now forgotten.

With my pets and my books I found life good, not realising how much better it would have been had I not lacked what is every child's birthright. I was not aware of any lack in my life; I mean consciously aware. I had never received any affection in my life, and what love my dead mother had lavished upon me I was too young at her death to remember it afterwards, or indeed to benefit by it. Had I been asked in those young days if I were happy I should have been astonished at the question and replied that of course I was, for there is a grain of truth (if a bushel of untruth) in the saying: What you've never had you never miss. It is only by after-knowledge, by experience of life, and by measuring one's self against those who have been more fortunate, that one learns how great, how irreparable, the lack, the loss, has been.

But I was now to endure a period of unhappiness without any mitigation: my four years at Selchester, that famous school whose alumni have written so many pages of England's history. There is much to be said in favour of boarding

schools; much to be said against them; but I do not propose to hold the scales. If education at a boarding school is the choice for a boy his entry should not be postponed, as it was in my case, until he is fourteen. He should first proceed at ten to a preparatory school. But it should be a preparatory school in fact and not merely in name: a school where one is prepared for the discipline of the public school. It should stand midway between school and home, and there should be room in it for a measure of affection, the kindness, the tolerance, and the freedoms of home. It should not be, as it almost invariably is, a public school for younger boys, with the same disciplines and punishments the older boys are called upon to face. Discipline should be easy and kindly and without any form of corporal punishment. All flogging is an abomination, an infamy. All men who flog are brutes; they are frequently beasts; and often filthy beasts. It is said that no boys' school can be run without flogging. That is a lie. Are not girls' schools run without flogging? Logically, if boys are flogged girls should be flogged. If the world agrees, as it does, that the flogging of girls is revolting and not to be endured, why does it not find the flogging of boys equally revolting? Public opinion will not allow horses and dogs to be flogged, but its eyes, and its ears, are closed to the flogging of boys.

Discipline cannot be maintained without flogging. That is an ancient lie. The Duke of Wellington gave evidence before a Royal Commission that the discipline of the army could not be maintained if flogging were abolished. He lied. Let it be admitted that he lied because he was a stupid man without a spark of imagination, as are most military commanders. It is a sad commentary upon human life that these dull butchers whose sole asset is so often an imposing presence should be the most honoured and rewarded of mankind. Let us have done with this hideous bestiality of flogging, which has bred more evil in the world than any other of men's vices or inhumanities. To the mental hospital (where they belong) with all thrashing schoolmasters, birching policemen, and cat-wielding prison officers! and with all those too who order such bloody obscenities!

At the age of fourteen I was taken from my home and thrust into the brutal jungle of a great public school. It was a

home where admittedly I had never known human love or even affection; but it was a home where life ran easily and gently, especially gently; where I had much freedom; where I was at least never derided, never beaten; where I had my pets and my books and all those other resources which an imaginative boy will find in river and field and forest. And I had privacy: there were a dozen places where I could be alone with my dreams, for I was much given to dreaming, and my dreams were the long, enchanted dreams of young boyhood.

I was quite literally appalled by my introduction to the life at Selchester. From the first I was a marked boy. I suppose some boys always are. I was derided, mocked, and bullied. I was small for my age, thin, sallow, ugly. I had always been aware of my ugliness, but it had never intruded itself upon me, never hurt me. At Selchester it was one more weapon against me. There were many others. Because of my name they declared I was a German. When I protested that it was three hundred years since Frederick Essenhigh had left Hamburg to settle in England and that now the Essenhighs were as English as the king, they retorted, 'once a German, always a German'; and they kicked my legs and twisted my arms and beat me with a cricket stump for insulting the king. They jeered at me for a Jew. No Essenhigh was ever a Jew. When I said this they told me I lied and that I looked a Jew, which, with my black hair, sallow face, and Roman nose perhaps I did. And when I denied it vehemently and with tears they pulled down my trousers and exposed my circumcision. I tried to defend myself, saying that circumcision was not restricted to Jews; and they told me against all the facts that I was a little liar. And when, goaded to a desperate anger that momentarily conquered my intense fear and hatred of pain, I blurted out that there must be dozens of other circumcised boys at Selchester and not one a Jew and grotesquely challenged a showdown, they called me a dirty little beast and thrashed me. Because I was fond of books and fond of study it was held against me that I was a mugger (the Selchester word for such a boy), and I was more persecuted for this perhaps than for all the rest together. It was a tradition at Selchester not to work, to do the barest minimum. It was a tradition honoured by most boys, whether brilliant or dull. To the brilliant boys

it did not matter, for a minimum of work enabled them to reach the low standard demanded; but to the dull boys it brought thrashings; thrashings which were accounted to them for honour. Their weals, their bleeding weals (for the thrashings were of a disgusting, an abhorrent severity), were honourable wounds to be endured with fortitude, displayed with pride, and inspected with the grossest flattery. While the brilliant boys were usually much admired, my brilliance (for my talents shone dazzlingly in that murky atmosphere) was a double offence as the attribute of a mugger. It was taking the meanest of advantages; it was not playing the game; not cricket. One might use cribs, cheat at examinations, hack at soccer or make dirty tackles at rugger, and still be a worthy member of the community: but to be brilliant and a mugger was to be as hated, despised, and execrated as Judas.

To say that I was as unpopular with the masters as with the boys would not be true. I was clever; I worked hard; and my behaviour was irreproachable. Such a combination is unusual in a boy, and so rare a bird is a prized possession of form and house and school. But the masters did not like me, and because of this they favoured less able boys than myself, so that in the term examinations I sometimes found myself beaten for first place (and occasionally even for second) by boys so much my inferior that such results were grotesque and to be explained only by the grossest partiality on the part of the master marking the papers. Why the masters disliked me I don't know. I was not, perhaps, a likeable boy. No one except my pets had ever liked me. I was hopeless at games. That may have been the reason for the general dislike of me. I funkied in games, I freely admit it. I was afraid of being hurt. I was so sensitive to pain that I was desperately afraid of being hurt. The very thought of being the object of a rough rugger tackle or of standing up to a fast cricket ball turned my bowels to water; and although boxing for one term was supposed to be compulsory I refused to put on the gloves, and refused so flatly and doubtless with such a frenzy of obvious distress that Sergeant Bates took the wise and kind course of turning a blind eye in my direction: one of the few kind acts done to me at Selchester. It was my dread of pain that made my conduct so exemplary, for there was nothing I would not do or

refrain from doing to avoid the remotest risk of corporal punishment. The Headmaster of Selchester was the Rev. Matthew Brewer, M.A., D.D. He was not a tall man, but was very powerfully built. He was bull-throated, his head immense, his jaws, even when freshly shaven, dark, purplish. He was a great flogger. Usually he flogged in his study, but occasionally, for some particularly outrageous offence and as a warning to the school, there was a ceremonial flogging in Hall. During my first two years at Selchester I witnessed two such floggings. They turned me sick. They filled me with panic, horror, and fear. They, and one other, have haunted me all my life since. I am always liable to dream of them even at this distant date. There they lie in the deeps of my consciousness ever ready in sleep to come to life again, to pounce upon me and renew their hideous power over me. I cannot describe those floggings. I dare not, lest I evoke things and thoughts too dreadful to contemplate. But I can describe the Rev. Matthew Brewer as he made ready for his bloody work, for his debauch. He minced towards the pile of canes brought in by the school captain and laid beside the form. He slowly unbuttoned the sleeves of his jacket and turned them back; whisked his gown free with a quick gesture; and then with the care of a fencer selecting a foil he chose a cane and stepped back.

For weeks afterwards, if I saw him approaching in the distance, I shrunk away, terrified. The sound of his voice (he was known as the Bull of Bashan) appalled me. I feared that if I once came under his notice he might turn on me those pale blue eyes, find in me something of which to disapprove, and decide to flog me. A grotesque, a ludicrous fear, of course; but when was fear ever logical? Fortunately, one rarely ran across the Headmaster. We were in continuous contact with form masters and, to a lesser extent, house masters (I was in Lancing), but to a boy who behaved himself a meeting with the Head was to be almost as little anticipated as an average man's with the King. And I behaved myself. Never can conduct as a scholar have been surpassed.

Despite my unpopularity with boys and masters; despite my showing at games; despite my rather insignificant physique, my outstanding achievements in my studies made

it impossible, when the time came, for my claims to a monitorship to be passed over; and shortly after my sixteenth birthday I became a house monitor. I never aspired to a school monitorship and I never achieved one. But at Selchester even a house monitorship brought with it considerable privileges, the chief of which in my eyes was the privacy of a study to myself. To me that was a boon of inestimable, of incalculable value. To few boys could it have meant so much as it did to me. It was a hide-out; a refuge; a sanctuary; a place where I could work or read or dream undisturbed. It was a privilege I would have given anything to obtain, made any sacrifice to keep.

In the next study was Miles Clavey. He was one of the few boys I liked at Selchester, and for a time, against all reason, I thought he liked me. There could have been no greater contrast between two human beings. He was well built, handsome; he was captain of rugger; a fine boxer; he held the school record for the mile; and he was considered to be a safe bet for the school captaincy in due course. And in school work he was my nearest rival. The most coveted academical honour at Selchester was the winning of the famous Holford Biology Scholarship. It was worth £250 a year for five years; but it was the distinction conferred upon the winner and not the money that I coveted. The money was a bagatelle to me. My father treated me generously; his large fortune would come to me at his death, and I should in any case under my grandfather's will come in for three thousand a year when I was twenty-one. With Miles Clavey it was different. His people were poor and he badly needed the money. He told me he did not care twopence for the honour, but the money was everything to him, as he doubted if he would be able to go to Cambridge at all without it.

On reaching the age of sixteen at Selchester (and provided the Upper V had been reached) a boy was supposed to choose what he proposed to read for the next two years as a preparation for the University: Science, History, English, the Classics, and so forth. Most boys chose Classics (for Selchester's tradition was classical), which meant in practice that they could continue along the easy, idle path they had been treading the past two years. The boys who really 'meant business' (and in

the whole school there were not three score of these) usually chose, in this order of preference, English, History, Science. For Clavey and me, as probable contenders for the Holford, Science was the inevitable choice; and when the new school year began there were seven other boys besides our two selves in Science VI; and of these seven, two, Mollison and Spencer were their names, were also possible competitors for the Holford.

Selchester was about three-quarters of a mile from Chalfont Deering, which was out of bounds to all boys except monitors, who were allowed in twice a week on a pass. It was a small, rather dull town with more public-houses than might have been expected from its size. Closing time was at ten-thirty, and as lights out at Selchester was nine-thirty (ten in the summer term) inevitably some of the older boys made clandestine visits to one or other of the public-houses (*The Red Cow* being the most popular) to smoke, drink beer, and flirt with the barmaids. For this violation of the strict school rule several boys during the previous three or four years had been privately flogged by the Head; and there had been one ceremonial flogging of a flagrant case in which a drunken rough-and-tumble with a young townsman had called for the sternest measures. Matters were brought to a sensational head when a barmaid brought a paternity order against one of the boys, whom she also accused of being a frequent visitor at the public-house where she was employed. The boy vehemently denied having consorted with the girl, having ever met her, and declared further that he had never set foot in the public-house. He was represented by a solicitor, and the girl not only lost her case, but her evidence was so shaken and discredited that the Head accepted the boy's story, and there the matter ended as far as he was concerned. But Dr. Brewer was furious that such a charge could be brought against a Selchester boy, and he addressed the whole school in Hall, warning us that the next boy who was found to have visited Chalfont Deering after lights out would be publicly flogged and then expelled.

The case had caused a good deal of talk in the town, which sided with the barmaid, and there was the usual talk about one law for the rich and another for the poor and several minor demonstrations against monitors there shopping, so

that for a time few boys went there. How much this ill-feeling had to do with the event I must now describe with loathing, with hate, and with a trembling pen, I do not know. Something, perhaps. But I was never in any doubt upon whose shoulders rested the chief responsibility.

One morning early in November the Head sent for me to his study. This in itself was sufficient to throw me into a condition of the most acute perturbation; and when he showed me a handkerchief marked with my name and asked me in a terrible voice if I agreed that it was mine my ghastly appearance must already have convicted me in his eyes of the crime with which he was about to charge me. The previous night a young fellow believed to be a Selchester boy had visited *The Red Cow*, drunk several pints of beer, made a disturbance, and left as a result of a certain amount of violence. The handkerchief had been found on the floor after his departure. It was a wet night, a very wet night, and the Head told me that my wardrobe held a wet raincoat and a soaked pair of boots. What had I to say? I denied everything; but such was my terror that my denials, my frenzied denials, must have added to his conviction of my guilt. I said boys in my dormitory would say that I was in bed and asleep by ten o'clock. But when the boys were interrogated none could, or would, say definitely that this was the case. They 'didn't know'; they 'hadn't noticed.' I abandoned myself to a dreadful despair; and when several of the townsmen who had been in *The Red Cow* that night 'thought I was very much like the boy,' and a potman roundly declared I was 'the young devil and no one else,' I could touch no further depth of anguish. It detracted nothing from my agonised state that I was certain my false friend Miles Clavey was the culprit. True, he was several inches taller than I and better built, but that did not weigh with me. I knew with that certainty that comes with intuition rather than from reason that he was the culprit. And if he had not actually gone there in person, he had engineered the whole thing in all its base and perfidious infamy.

My horror of punishment, my frenzied dread of pain, made me the worst of witnesses in my own defence. Guilt, to the unimaginative and superficial eye, was written plainly in my ashen face, staring eyes, and trembling limbs. And then I

believed that a chance of escape from the torment offered itself, and I clutched at it. The Head said that in view of my previous exemplary behaviour, and because of my fine record of work, he would mitigate the punishment to a public flogging without expulsion. There seemed here a gleam of hope, and I snatched at it. Despite the abhorrence with which I knew my father would regard my expulsion and despite my dread of his contempt, I told Dr. Brewer that I would rather be expelled than flogged. When I said this his pale blue eyes regarded me steadfastly a long minute and he rasped his blue chin between his finger and thumb, while my heart stood still. And then he shook his head and said No, that he felt a flogging would be the more suitable, the more merciful punishment. I pleaded with him, breaking down into sobbing; but even while I pleaded I knew he was resolved to flog me; that already in anticipation he was enjoying the convulsed writhings of my tortured body. And so he dismissed me, telling me the punishment would take place before the assembled school in Hall the following morning at nine o'clock, and that I was not to have any breakfast.

I would have taken my life that night, but I had not the courage to do it bloodily by the only method at my command; and so I endured a night of unspeakable anguish. It is only too true that a coward dies many times, and I suffered in anticipation that flogging a hundred times throughout that dreadful night. Am I, is any coward to be mocked for that?

But the flogging was worse even than my anticipation. It was brutal to the last degree. Even before the first stroke fell on me my water was running down my leg, and long before the twelfth stroke had been delivered I had bewrayed myself. Worse, I violated the school traditions by screaming. I tried not to scream, but they were wrenched from me, and in my convulsive agony I bit through my tongue.

My monitorship with its privilege of a study was taken from me. But I no longer cared what was taken from me or heaped upon me so long as I was not flogged again. And I was never flogged again. I have said that I would have killed myself that night if I had been brave enough. That is true. It is equally true when I say that the flogging killed me. It killed

the boy I had been. The boy who survived was a different person.

Outwardly I took up my life again where it had been left off when the first stroke fell. I went back to my work in Science VI. I moved and walked and talked and ate among my fellows, at first under many looks of contempt and aversion, but presently unregarded. I was *facile princeps* in form and in examination, outdistancing Miles Clavey without difficulty. We no longer spoke. But hardly anyone spoke to me, and soon I came not to notice who did and who refrained. I did not care. All I cared about was my work and to avoid punishment.

In May 1909 Miles Clavey and I and John Spencer sat for the Holford. There were five papers and the examination lasted three days. The questions suited me perfectly and I answered them brilliantly. I knew the Holford was mine. I never for one moment after I put my pen down at the end of the third day doubted that for one single instant. Nor did I doubt that my marks would far exceed the previous highest aggregate: 435 out of a possible 500, gained in 1895 by F. H. Meldrum, the famous biologist and lecturer at Cambridge. Meldrum that year was to mark the papers. The result was known about three weeks before the end of term, the list being put up on the Head's notice-board. I stood for perhaps a whole minute staring at the board, heedless of the jostle of bodies around me and of all the chattering tongues. The figures were: Miles Clavey 418, Luther Essenhight 398, John Spencer 336. They swam before my eyes. I did not believe them. I thought I was going to faint. Or worse, to cry. As I turned and walked away I was conscious of a clamour of voices, of things being said. What was said I did not know, but I guessed that I was being jeered at.

I do not think I slept at all that night. I was working out a problem: how Miles Clavey had come to beat me so soundly. I had no difficulty in remembering the questions which had been set, and one by one I went through them and my answers; not briefly, but in full. And when I had finished I knew that my marks were wrong; that they should have been at least 460. How had the mistake happened, and what was to be done about it? Nothing as far as I could see. I must put up

with it; accept as correct the 398 marks awarded to me by Professor F. H. Meldrum instead of the 460 which I was sure I should have had. Those 460 marks I knew I had earned. The highest aggregate ever earned in the Holford. Better than the previous highest (435) made by Meldrum in 1895. Made by Meldrum. Made by Meldrum. The words began to sing in my ears, and immediately the truth burst its way into my mind: Meldrum had deliberately marked me down. It seemed at first a preposterous assumption, and I rejected it; but the more I thought about it the more convinced I became, until at last, just before the first bell went, I was certain I had hit upon the truth. And in that moment my career was decided upon. I would go to Cambridge and I would study biology. Under Meldrum, of course. But not for long would I sit at the feet of Gamaliel. It should be at my feet that Gamaliel would sit, and the whole world should acknowledge that I was the master, he the pupil. It would be a fine revenge; the only possible revenge for a man of science. Should I or should I not go to Trinity? I debated this while I slowly dressed (for I always got up at the first bell), but it was not until the middle of the morning when during break I had congratulated Miles Clavey and received the smug acknowledgment and his 'you ran me pretty close, old boy,' that I determined to go to Trinity. I'd take that smug superior smile off Clavey's face, and I wanted to be at hand to watch it fade.

And so in September 1909 I went up to Trinity and was there five years. They were not happy years. As I look back on them I should describe them as frustrated years. I was frustrated in my work; I was frustrated in my attempts to form friendships; and I was frustrated when I sought amongst the girls of the town to find a compensation for my other failures, for my unhappiness. It was, of course, Meldrum who frustrated me in my work, and much as I, as a man of science, hate to bring such a charge against another man of science, I know that Meldrum deliberately put obstacles in my path, hindered me, held up my work, because he was jealous of me. He knew, as men always do in such cases, that I was the better man, and he hated me for it and saw to it that my threat to outrival him was nullified. I know what I am saying and I say it deliberately. How otherwise can be explained my failure to

take an honours degree? Miles Clavey did not fail, nor a dozen others. But I failed. I, easily the master of them all. Of them all. Not omitting Meldrum.

I made no friends, although I felt the need of friendship more than ever before in my life. But it did not come my way. How happy I might have been had things been different! A man with money and a host of friends or, I doubt not, even with one friend, could be very happy at Cambridge, especially if he is also doing the work he wants to do. But friendship was not for me. It was not the way of life that had been ordained for me. It was not in my star. And when I tried to compensate myself for this emotional lack by picking up girls in the town I found only humiliation and a deeper and more bitter frustration. I felt they were laughing at me. I knew they were. They were greedy little creatures and took all I gave them, but they gave me nothing in return. I do not mean that they refused me what I might have bought from any prostitute. I did not want that. I did not want that at all. The very thought of such intimacy was repellent, abhorrent. But I wanted their smiles, their laughter, their appreciation. I wanted that look in their eyes which I had noticed so often in girls' eyes, but never in eyes turned upon me. I wanted them to put their hand upon my arm in the caressing way girls have. I don't suppose that look means a great deal, or that caress. But I hungered for them. They did not come my way. There were in truth smiles and laughter, but they were behind my back. I knew. One gets to know such things. One's ears, one's eyes, all one's senses, learn an exquisite sensitivity.

Do not think that I wasted my time at Cambridge in morbid yearnings for friendship and love. Not in the least. I quickly accepted the fact that such things were apparently not for me; not in my destiny; or not yet. Meanwhile there was my work, and I threw myself into it with all the ardour and enthusiasm I possessed, and with all that assiduity, that utter preoccupation, that obsession, which can make a man forget meals, forget sleep, forget everything, except the one ruling passion. It was then that I first began to feel, to *know*, that I had some special work in the world to do; great and important work; predestined work; and above all work that

no other man could do. It was this conviction that supported me in my hours of unhappiness. Not always should I be frustrated, humiliated, neglected, contemned. The world was going to hear of me. And when that time came the world would regard with utter astonishment the indifference of these little creatures whose vapid lives simmered and bubbled about me; and would say to them: 'How did it come about that you atomies failed to recognise the giant in your midst?'

And so with my dreams, and my visions of the greatness which lay ahead for me, I was, after my fashion, happy enough during the last two years of my career at Cambridge; and even my failure to obtain an honours degree did not depress me unduly, for I knew the reason; I recognised the jealous, the envious, hand of Meldrum in that fantastic result. Cambridge would one day be ashamed of that petty piece of spite. And how would she justify herself, exculpate herself, in that destined day when the world was showering honours upon me? It will be a blot upon her honour that all the seas will not wash out nor all the years obliterate. I could wait. My time was coming. Meanwhile my years at Cambridge were ended; my father was dead and I was possessed of a large fortune. What were my immediate plans? It was a question which events, world events, answered quickly and astonishingly. So astonishingly, indeed, that in retrospect, when the immediate urgency and stress and colour of things has faded, I find it almost impossible to understand how it happened: how I could have been so easily persuaded into a course of action so utterly antagonistic, antipathetic, to my temperament, and, indeed, so out of accord with my work and ambition.

Early that July I was in London, and I went into *The Florence* in Rupert Street for luncheon. As I sat down I noticed a familiar face at a near table, and to my surprise I received a friendly smile, a nod, and a gesture of invitation. It was a man named Seegar who had come down from Cambridge a year previously and with whom I had at times exchanged a few words of conversation, which was the nearest approach to friendship I achieved there. He told me he was in the Foreign Office; and when later on during the meal I

said I was shortly leaving England for a long holiday on the Continent and proposed to visit Austria, Germany, and Russia, he said, "I shouldn't," and to my amazement told me that it was considered extremely likely that we should be at war with Germany within the next six weeks. And when I said that that ancient wolf had been cried too often and that I should not allow so hoary a perennial to interfere with my plans, he said, "You'll regret it. If you're in Germany and war breaks out you'll be kept in a prison camp till it is over, and that wouldn't be a pleasant experience. The Germans have a bad record for brutality towards civilians; whether that does them an injustice I don't know, but there it is."

That frightened me, and although I did not say so I then and there changed my plans. I certainly did not now propose to go abroad just yet. And then he said something which frightened me even more. "And if it comes," he said, "the people who ought to know think it will be a long war, several years probably, and that before it is over we shall have to put every able-bodied man into the forces."

"Willy-nilly?" I said.

He nodded.

"But that," I said, "is conscription."

Again he nodded. "Exactly. And if I were Asquith I'd introduce conscription the day after hostilities began."

I have forgotten what else we talked about, for I gave him after that but the surface of my mind. My thoughts were busily occupied. Conscription. I should be dragged into the army, forced to fight, to face death and wounds and pain. It was too much. I could not do that. Every nerve shuddered and revolted at the thought. I should have to find some way of escape.

But I found none. Instead, within six weeks of that talk with Seegar I was in the army, humiliated into it by a girl who gave me a white feather in Oxford Street. I did not join a combatant unit. The very idea of fighting another man with a gun or a bayonet filled me with sick terror. I knew I could do no such thing. There must be some way of escape from that; something I could do without any great risk of being wounded. Someone told me of the R.A.M.C., and I joined that. The corps had, I thought, many attractions as a service.

Only doctors could hold commissions in its ranks (except the quartermaster), and I did not want a commission. I did not want to lead men anywhere, especially into danger. I was appalled at the bare thought of such a thing happening. And with my scientific training I felt that I could be of some use and might be able to achieve some pleasant little post in barracks at home. But I was soon disillusioned. I learned that we should be in France before Christmas and that part of my duties would be stretcher-bearing, despite the fact that the infantry had its own stretcher-bearers. I had not dreamt of any such thing when I joined, and no one had told me. I had been inveigled into the army, into this dangerous service, on false pretences. The prospect of stretcher-bearing terrified me, and the tales I heard about men in the R.A.M.C. being blown to pieces added to my terror. Fortunately, before we left England we were paraded and men were asked to volunteer for the Sanitary Service, which, it was explained, meant that we should be in charge of all field and camp sanitation and of the water supplies. This seemed safer than stretcher-bearing and also would offer scope for my scientific training. I therefore transferred to the Sanitary Service.

But I do not wish to follow the course of my military service. It was ignominious enough. No square hole could ever have been fitted with a rounder peg. I avoided danger wherever it was possible to creep away from it. I undertook the most menial and degrading work because it offered the most chances of avoiding a wound, of avoiding pain: cook, batman, sanitary man, delouser, anything which would keep my shrinking body and quivering nerves remote from those hideous places where frenzied men fired rifles, hurled grenades, and disembowelled one another with bayonets. We were continually being paraded and badgered by fierce red-faced men of high rank to take commissions in a combatant unit; and many of the men were persuaded, so many indeed that my section completely changed its personnel several times over during the war. Except for me. I was not to be persuaded. That I should leave my safe if greasy job in the cook-house for that of a second-lieutenant whose life, everyone said, was not more than a week was an exchange into which I could only have been persuaded by the threat of a flogging. And so

while they put up their pips and became 2nd-Lieut. This, That, and the Other, and died, I remained Private Luther Essenhigh, whom everybody could snub, curse, jeer at, and put upon. But I did not care. I was inured to such treatment. I was safe. Let them die if they wanted to. They were no friends of mine. I had no friends. As for my talents, my gifts, my scientific knowledge, the army had no use for them. And so I cooked; or cleaned an officer's boots; or emptied latrines. I did not care. My time would come. I could wait. I had learned to endure and to wait.

And so I come to September 1918. I was going on my fourth leave. It was for ten days, and at eight o'clock on a sunny morning I stood in a long queue of men waiting outside the station of St. Pol for the Military Transport Officer's bureau to open. I have forgotten now why we had to wait there. I don't think anyone knew. We just had to wait. We had been there since six o'clock, when we had been turned out of our train of horse-boxes, which had then gone clanking off empty. We did not know in the least how long we should have to wait. No one knew. We should have to wait and see. That long line of brown-clad men seemed like some dumb, patient beast slumped there doggedly waiting. Except that they were not dumb.

Just before nine o'clock a staff officer came strolling by glitteringly gold-braided, red-tabbed, and bepolished. He might have come straight from the stage of a musical comedy. He was the romance of war; we the reality. As he drew near, the long line of tired, hot, irritable men stiffened. You could see the stiffening ripple along the line, keeping pace with his approach, like the ripples of a crawling caterpillar. We drew ourselves up into the grotesque postures demanded by discipline; we, three hundred human beings, while one other human being strolled by and gave all our gymnastics not so much as a glance. We did not look at him, except obliquely, furtively. I would as soon have dared to look at him boldly, straightly, as a Japanese would dare to outface his emperor. That gaudy strutting figure intimidated, overawed, me in a fashion no civilian can understand. He was, as it happened, a Brigade Major; I, an English private soldier who had been in the ranks four years. No English soldier (if any, one day, come to

read these words) but will be able to visualise that scene and to enter completely into my feelings.

And then I heard a voice, a familiar voice, yet for the moment unplaced, say, "Good God! Essenhigh! what the devil are you doing here?"

I dared then to look up. To look at the Brigade Major. It was Miles Clavey. "I'm going on leave, sir," I said, no more able to omit the 'sir' than I could omit to breathe.

"The devil you are!" he said, and took my arm and pulled me out of the line and walked off with me.

He asked me about myself, what I had been doing these last years, and what I was waiting for there in the hot morning sunshine outside St. Pol Station. I told him. I told him of my four years as a private soldier, as cook, batman, and so on. And I told him I and all those other men had been waiting there since six o'clock to see the R.T.O., and would probably have to wait until noon. But he did not understand a word. I was talking in a foreign tongue about a world he did not know. He had never served in the ranks. I had served four years as a private. We were as far apart as a closely guarded young virgin princess and some cheap, bedraggled whore of a suburban pavement. There was no bridging the gulf between us. And so I gave up trying to be intelligible and asked him about himself.

He told me a good deal, but the only thing that immediately interested me was that he too was going on leave; that I needn't bother to see the R.T.O.; and that I could travel with him. "Er—come as my batman," he said, glancing at me quickly and almost shyly, and adding, "if you won't mind, my dear fellow."

What different worlds we lived in. Or rather had lived in for the past four years. "Mind," I said, and again another 'sir' slipped out on the stream of four years' discipline; "if you'll put your boots up on the seat," indicating a public bench, "I'll give them a rub up now." And I drew out from my sleeve a dirty khaki handkerchief.

Perhaps I embarrassed him. I did not mean to. I was, in fact, overwhelmed by his kindness. Why was he doing it? Not from friendship. I had no friends. As a salve for his conscience? Probably that. Yes, I think that. As I say, I think I

must have embarrassed him, and he asked me suddenly if I'd had any breakfast.

I could have laughed at the assumption that I might have done; and when I said I had not, he said that although he'd had a mouthful about eight he felt like a good meal, and as we'd an hour before the train went we'd go to a restaurant and eat.

Well, we ate and talked and smoked, and afterwards caught the train; and before we reached England we had arranged to see a good deal of each other in London, where we both intended to stay. I still don't know why he did this. Not out of any liking for me. I can think of no other explanation but his conscience.

And a very pleasant time we had. We both wore civilian clothes (something of a sacrifice for him, but to me sheer paradise), and so could go about together. In England in wartime there are no places closed to a brigade major and few open to a private soldier.

And on the fourth day of my leave he introduced me to Barbara Shelley; and before I could save myself I had fallen passionately, desperately, in love with her. The folly of it! for she was beautiful. I cannot describe her. Who can describe beauty? She was small and slender and golden-haired and her voice was entrancing. All men might not conceivably have found her as beautiful as I did. To me she was beauty incarnate; the loveliest thing I had ever known. And I fell in love with her. The folly of it. The tragic folly of it. For how could she love me? me, who had never had even a friend amongst women and at whom most laughed. Worse, lowest and bitterest depth of folly, I believed she loved me. She told me she did, and I believed her, and for a time (how long? can one measure time in these things?) I enjoyed a happiness beyond credence. I had forgotten I had twenty thousand a year and that Barbara knew it.

We were married a day before my leave ended, and had one night together. And I proved an inadequate lover. Let me leave it as baldly as that. These things happen. They are distressing, humiliating, at the time; and in recollection how amusingly trifling, or tragically poignant!

I returned to my unit. I had not let her see me in my

clumsy, ugly private's khaki, and I had no intention of her seeing me so dressed. Already I had enough to live down without leaving her that picture in her mind for perhaps nearly a year before I saw her again, for I had no notion that the war was virtually over. I returned to my unit in a state of great humiliation, chagrin, shame, wretchedness, and the most desperate sickness of love. And in that condition I remained a week. And then I received a letter from Barbara. It was a masterpiece of dissimulation. It was full of tender phrases and caressing words; there was no hint of my pitiful showing as a lover; nothing but expressions of her love and her longing for the war to be over and our life together. It was masterly. It deceived me completely. The incredible had happened. I was loved, and by the loveliest human being I had ever imagined. As I finished that piece of master-craftsmanship I climbed to a pinnacle of sheer joyous happiness few human beings can ever achieve. I felt like a God, and my face, I dare swear, was transfigured as Christ's upon the mountain; my very clothes, that hideous khaki, must have shone from the light within.

In a few weeks the war had ended, and early in 1919 I returned home to take up my life with Barbara. And for eleven years I followed at her heels about the world, living the strenuously idle life of the fashionable rich. I had settled on her five thousand a year, and there was therefore no need for her, except the traditional obligation to honour a bargain, to simulate feelings she did not possess. I believe she did try for a while to honour that bargain, but the position was an impossible one. I learnt in time some aptitude as a lover, but the very greatness of my love for her handicapped me. I was too gentle, too timid, too afraid of giving offence, fearful lest a caress might be unwelcome, an embrace too rough. My gentleness, my timidity, would have fought for me in some women's hearts. Perhaps they would in Barbara's heart had she loved me.

I do not remember now how long it was before I realised that she did not love me; that she did not even like me. Not long; you may be sure of that. I who have always been so sensitive to pain, whose nerves have always been naked to the air, I came quickly to that annihilating truth. I knew long,

long before she had any notion that I knew. It was indeed an annihilating truth. Something broke in me then as something had broken when I was publicly flogged at Selchester. But I kept it all to myself. She did not deny herself to me and she did her best to respond, but I knew that her dislike was passing into physical aversion, repulsion, even before she was aware that I knew she did not love me.

And then she knew. She said nothing about it; nor I. I do not remember now how I discovered it. Perhaps it was the advent of her first lover. Her first after our marriage, I mean. We should have parted then, and she would, I am sure, have been glad of it. But I could not do it. I could not bear to lose her; not then or later, when she took lover after lover and did not try to hide it. I sank as low as a man can sink. I shut my eyes and my ears; and for the sake of crumbs from love's table; for a few kisses; a caress now and then; and an occasional admission to her bed. I put up with everything for that. I could not let her go. And even when there was nothing for me but an occasional casual kiss, or a touch of her hand, or of her bare arm when she allowed me to help her into her cloak, I could not make the break. I think it must have been immediately after her first meeting with Grover Rayburn that she shut me out from all her loveliness. From the first day they made no secrecy about their attraction for each other. She was then just thirty and in the very flower of her beauty; he a few years older. He was a young American, big, handsome, debonair, vital (I think that is the word), and poor. We were at Cairo. And soon they were lovers, and everyone in Cairo knew and were smiling at me behind my back. Perhaps they thought I did not know. One or two did in fact try, not too adroitly, to tell me. Even then I could not let her go. I was satisfied just to be with her in the same house: to hear her footsteps; breathe the fragrance of her body; listen to her enchanting voice and laughter.

But it was taken out of my hands. Young Rayburn wanted her; he wanted to marry her; he could not brook my living in the same house with her and passing as her husband. People might think he was sharing her with me. *With me!* (I inadvertently heard them talking one day; I did not catch the words he said, but that 'with me' gives their flavour.) And so

they went away together and she wrote asking me to divorce her. I cabled my solicitor and he flew to Cairo to meet me. I told him I wished to be the guilty party, and so it was arranged, and I agreed to a payment of five thousand a year alimony. She refused this through her solicitor, but I insisted. I wrote to her without my solicitor's knowledge, 'off the record' as we say, and told her that if she had any wish to do me one more kindness she would accept the money. And so at last she agreed. Why did I write that sentimental, quixotic nonsense? It was not that at all. It was just the truth. I loved her. I loved her so much that my own happiness was nothing to hers. It gave me a little happiness to be still able to give her something. There was nothing I would not have given to her; nothing I would not have endured, coward as I am. I would have steeled myself to endure it. Heroics? No, I do not think so. I am sure that is not true. I loved her. Isn't that enough? And once, just for a short time, I believed she loved me and walked among the stars. No, it is not heroics; nor grovelling. If you think so you do not understand what love is; nor what I am; and you may jeer to your heart's content. I am beyond your hurting.

With the complete severance of my relations with Barbara I was for the time being an emotionally and spiritually broken man. I returned to England wondering what I was going to do with my life, and after some months of empty, aimless days and of nights haunted by dreams of Barbara I realised that I did not want to do anything with my life; there was nothing I could do with it. Its continuance was a torment that I was fast losing the fortitude to bear. I decided to end it.

I am a tidy man. I did not want to end my life leaving my affairs in anything but apple-pie order. There was not a great deal to be done, but what there was, especially on the financial side, I wanted done properly and securely: I did not want any loopholes left through which predatory hands might stretch to violate my wishes. I called on my solicitor and told him that I proposed to end my life and wanted all my affairs tidied up before I went.

He expressed no surprise at this statement of my intention; nor did he make any attempt to dissuade me. By his manner

one would have judged it was the sort of thing he was hearing every day from one client or another. It was this attitude (the very one I was not prepared for) which persuaded me to follow the advice he tendered me at the end of our interview: that I should see a friend of his who was a psychiatrist.

I went to see this Dr. Gorton. Everything about him was calculated to impress one with his ordinariness, his orthodoxy. He was an M.D. of Cambridge. His consulting-rooms were in Wimpole Street. In appearance he was plump, well fed, the typical prosperous professional man; and he wore the clothes usually referred to as immaculate morning dress, and without which no stage doctor would be recognised by an audience as the genuine article.

He asked me why I proposed to commit suicide, and I told him.

He listened to me closely, nodding occasionally as a point seemed to appeal to him; and when I had finished he said: "There is a great deal to be said for suicide as a method of dying, and perhaps its most curious aspect is that it is an offence against the law, a criminal offence. Admittedly the Church is responsible for this anomaly, for anomaly it is, but whence the Church derives its authority in the matter it is hard to see. Certainly not from the Scriptures. To bring it within the scope of the Mosaic commandments by stigmatising it as self-murder is sheer casuistry. Shelley was sent down from Oxford for his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism*. When I was at Cambridge I wrote a pamphlet *The Necessity of Suicide*." He smiled and added: "Perhaps fortunately I failed to get it printed. When life holds no more savour; when one's powers, physical and intellectual, have wasted—"

"It is not the case," I broke in, "of my powers, physical or intellectual, having wasted; not in the least; and decidedly not my intellectual powers, which are now probably in their prime, and which, had I a motive, I do not doubt but would make a name for me."

"Yes," he said, "a motive. There must be, I imagine, always a motive; obvious sometimes; at others so concealed as to be unapparent. You had at one time considerable intellectual interests."

"I was a biologist. I studied at Cambridge under F. H. Meldrum."

"Ah, yes," he said, "Meldrum; I have met him several times. And were you always in agreement?"

"No," I said; "frequently not."

He nodded. "I have never thought him sound."

And so it went on. It was all cleverly done, and by the end of the interview I found myself, all idea of suicide dropped overboard, enthusiastically determined to take up my studies in biology where I had left off at Cambridge and to devote myself to research work. And in furtherance of this decision I purchased through an agent in December 1930 *Bevis Hall*, Seathorpe; had various alterations made, including the building of a fair-sized laboratory on the ground floor; and early in March the following year I moved in, accompanied by a manservant as my sole staff, Arthur Jackson, whom I intended to be my main, if not my only, contact with the outside world.

It cost me a good deal to make that resolution to renew my biological studies; it cost me infinitely more to put that resolution into effect; and had I realised beforehand the hard way which lay ahead I do not think I should have set out upon it. Not so easily was Barbara to be put out of mind; nor all the hours, the days, the years I had spent with her obliterated. She still obsessed me; still held empire over my mind through all the channels of my senses. No day passed but a hundred trifles reminded me of her, nor could I put her image from my eyes; it was always there; I saw her as vividly and clearly as I saw my own image in the glass; I heard her voice and her enchanting laughter. Time and again I was on the point of taking my life; but always I drew back; not because of any implied promise I had given to Dr. Gorton, but because, having once conquered the urge with assistance, pride or obstinacy now compelled me to conquer it alone. And presently I had a stronger ally than pride or obstinacy. When I had failed to win the Holford, and again when I had failed to obtain my honours degree, I had been saved from undue depression by the conviction that my life was a predestined one; that I had a great work to do in the world, and that one day I should inevitably do it. All that was required of me while waiting was patience and a determination to keep my hold

and to hang on. During my years with Barbara, those empty, useless, frittered years, that conviction had faded until it was forgotten. But now it came flooding back upon me with a strength tremendously renewed by its long absence; and by the very strength with which it invaded and possessed all my being I knew that the time drew near; that the hour for which I was born approached.

Yet all this while the research work upon which I had resolved to embark remained no more than a promise to myself. It was always to-morrow I was to begin, but to-morrow came and went, with nothing done. I was not idle, unless reading be idleness. I read widely, if not deeply. I did not confine my reading to biology; the whole range of science was my pasture. But I read little of anything else: an occasional biography or autobiography; a little poetry, Milton, Dryden, and Donne; the prophetic books of Blake; Swedenborg; fiction I had never read. Thus it was that one day (it was Saturday the seventeenth of June 1933) I came upon *A Memoir of Andrew Crosse*, by his widow. And as I read with fascinated and excited attention the account of Crosse's astounding experiments over the years 1807-37 I knew that the hour had struck: here was the work I had been sent to do.

Mark broke off his reading here and, looking up at the circle of faces around him, said, "I must make a digression here, if you are to follow the rest of Essenhigh's story, and give an account of Andrew Crosse's experiments to which he refers. My account is largely compiled from Mrs. Crosse's *Memoir*, a copy of which we found in Essenhigh's desk. An item or two I found in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and corroborative evidence in a volume, *Papers of the Royal Society for the Years 1830-40*, a copy of which was also among Essenhigh's things.

"Andrew Crosse, a member of a well-to-do county family, was born on June 17 in 1784 at Broomfield, West Somerset, in the Quantock Hills; and it was at *Fyne Court*, the family seat there, that he carried out all his electrical experiments in his private laboratory. He was only twenty-three years of age when he began these. Near his home was a large natural cave known as *Holwell Cavern*, whose walls were covered with

aragonite, which is one of the crystalline forms of calcium carbonate, or carbonate of lime. Crosse was a frequent and curious visitor to the cave, and after considerable thought he came to the conclusion that the scientific explanation of these great deposits of aragonite being due to the dropping of water charged with carbonate of lime was wrong. It occurred to him one day that the deposits might be due to electrical action, and bringing away with him from the cave a bottle of the water dripping from the roof and down its sides he set about making some experiments with a small voltaic battery." Mark looked up for a moment and smiled. "I will be as little technical as possible," he said, "chiefly because I know so little about electricity myself; and when I resume Essenhigh's story I shall supplement what few technicalities I have felt bound to include by the photographs and drawings. Crosse's first experiment was a very small and simple one. He placed the Holwell water in a tumbler and connected the poles of a battery by platinum wires let fall into the tumbler at opposite sides. He allowed electrical action to continue for nine days, but found to his disappointment that there were no signs of crystals on either platinum wire, and he was about to dismantle the apparatus when visitors caused him to postpone this for twenty-four hours. And then, to his excited delight, he found attached to the negative platinum wire some fine sparkling crystals, some of aragonite, some of calcite, and others of a kind he was unfamiliar with. In his diary he underlined the last eight words and added exclamation marks —and well he might, for those crystals were in fact an entirely new form of calcium carbonate; that is to say, they were unknown in nature. He repeated this experiment with the apparatus in darkness and obtained the crystals in six days. Thus was launched a train of thought which was responsible for his life-work and his unprecedented achievement.

"For some years, however, he was diverted from his true work by a study of the effects of electricity upon various human maladies, and during this period sufferers from rheumatism, paralysis, and St. Vitus's dance came in a growing stream to *Fyne Court* for treatment. There were many cures, some so spectacular as to seem miraculous; but a great percentage of these 'cures,' as is generally the case with electrical

treatment, did not prove permanent. But they brought Crosse gratitude from the local people and more than a local fame, for the cures of the Electric Wizard of Broomfield spread throughout Somerset. But because he made no charge for his treatment he was soon in conflict with the medical men of the neighbourhood, some of whom accused him openly of charlatany, while others put about that he was assisted in his work by the devil. This was a foretaste of the frantic abuse which years later was to be heaped upon him.

"He next devoted many years in various attempts to construct an electrical apparatus capable of giving perpetual light, heat, and motion. He also experimented for some time with electro-plating and produced extraordinary silver, gold, lead, and mercury crystallisations. Like many other experimenters with electricity, he was for a period attracted by the possibilities of the transmutation of metals, especially of lead into gold; but after many fruitless experiments he abandoned the search for another, equally attractive: the production of artificial diamonds.

"He at first succeeded in producing artificial crystals of quartz and over a score of new, that is to say, hitherto unknown, crystals; and in 1836 he produced artificial diamonds. These were, however, disappointingly small, and having decided that a more powerful low-frequency current was essential, he reconstructed his apparatus. But before he could carry out further experiments he was side-tracked, or rather precipitated, flung headlong, into his real life-work by an astonishing, an incredible, discovery in a piece of apparatus he had assembled some weeks earlier and left in darkness.

"What had happened was this: he had a few weeks previously prepared a solution of silicate of potassium, diluted it with boiling water, and added hydrochloric acid to supersaturation. In this solution he had placed a porous stone (oxide of iron) from Vesuvius. The stone was kept constantly electrified by means of two platinum wires on each side of it connected with the poles of a voltaic battery of ten pairs of five-inch zinc and copper plates. The object of this original piece of electrical apparatus was the artificial production of crystals of silica. At the end of ten days no crystals had formed and he considered the experiment a failure, but for no reason at

all (or 'just laziness,' as he comments in his diary) he did not dismantle the apparatus but put it aside in the dark, leaving the electric current still flowing." Mark looked up with a faint smile. "I hope this isn't boring you," he said; "but the worst is over and it gets tremendously exciting now.

"Five days later, going casually to the apparatus, he noticed a few minute whitish excrescences or nipples projecting from about the middle of the piece of Vesuvian stone, and examined them under a lens, but could make nothing of them. But his interest was aroused; more, indeed, than merely aroused, for he notes in his diary that the specks excited in him a feeling of wonder and expectancy quite incompatible with their apparently trifling nature. He later added a note to the effect that in the light of events that lay such a little way ahead that strange inexplicable excitement must have had something in common with the Scottish faculty of second sight.

"Almost hourly after this discovery he inspected the apparatus, but it was not until another four days had passed that he observed that these minute hemispherical shapes were not only growing steadily, but were putting out long, slender filaments, some six, some eight, some ten. Even now he had no idea what was happening under his eyes, happening for the first time under the eyes of any man on this planet.

"Another eight days of increasing and almost unbearable excitement passed, and now the filaments had become legs, the original hemispherical shapes were as large as a raspberry seed and had acquired a head and a bristly tail. Crosse notes here in his diary that while he was struck by the resemblance of these shapes to various sorts of mites (*acari* in the Latin), it did not occur to him that it was anything more than an odd resemblance. How could it? he asks: how could it possibly enter my head that it was anything more? That these things were alive?

"But he had not long to wait before there was no possibility of doubt as to what had happened, for on the following day he found some of these shapes, so like mites, swimming in the liquid or moving over the piece of stone exactly in the way of live insects. They were, in fact, live insects, or mites, and he had produced them, created them artificially by electrical

action. He notes in his diary, and one can imagine the shaking hand that wrote the words: 'This day, this sixteenth day of August in the year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six, I, Andrew Crosse, produced by artificial means a living creature, *Acarus Crossei*, *Acarus galvanicus*.'

"Some days later he noted that there were now dozens of these little creatures swimming about in the liquid or moving over the stone, and presently he was to observe them eating and later still breeding. His mind, he confesses, was a welter of confused and confusing questions: How, for example, had they come into being? Could he reproduce the experiment? How was it possible to produce living creatures in a liquid poisonous to animal life, and for them to continue to live in it?

"One day, about a week after the production of *Acarus Crossei*, he was watching the movements of the creatures ('my little mites') when an astonishing thing happened. One of the *acari* crawled out of the tank up the wire, and after resting for a time on the rim of the tank started to crawl along, slipped, fell into the tank: and disappeared. In his diary he has underlined the word three times and put a series of exclamation marks which succeed in giving something of the quality of that tremendous moment. Presently another *acarus* crawled up the wire out of the liquid, rested, and fell back: and disappeared. Crosse, now immensely excited, took a small glass rod and took out altogether eight of the *acari*, kept them out a few moments, and then returned them one by one to the liquid. All promptly disappeared. For days he puzzled over this amazing evanescence while the *acari* swam and crawled about the tank, increasing in numbers, but no longer in size. Finally he hit upon what seemed to him the solution: once removed from the solution into the air any return to the poisonous liquid was deadly to the *acari*; and, further, at death their bodies were dissolved in the liquid from which they had been created. This was only partly true. It was left to Essenhight to discover the whole truth; and much besides.

"Crosse never solved the mystery of that strange disappearance; nor did he apparently attempt to go any farther along the road of creation. He seemed to be content to repeat over and over again the same experiment with slight variations and

certain safeguards to ensure that the *acari* were not produced from invisible airborne ova which had obtained access to the apparatus. He used distilled water and boiled all parts of the apparatus before beginning his experiments. He considerably varied the solutions, using at different times nitrate of copper; potassium carbonate; sulphate of copper; green sulphate of iron; sulphate of zinc; pure water slightly acidulated with hydrochloric acid; a solution of arsenic in water. With the exception of the arsenic solution, he succeeded in producing *acari* in large numbers, some growing to the size of a small pea. He had one partial failure which he described as 'significant,' but he does not seem to have pursued that significance, whatever it may have been: he produced perfect *acari* in a strong chlorine solution, but they did not come alive. He noted in his diary, 'the vital something was missing here: what is that something?' He never found it. One other experiment of that time whose significance, whose tremendous significance, he also missed was the placing of a stick of charcoal red hot from the fire into a solution of potassium silicate, keeping the charcoal negatively charged for some days and covered by a bell-glass inverted over it in a dish of mercury. After five days fungi began to appear; and in ten days had covered the charcoal stick to the thickness of an inch. No *acari* appeared. Crosse missed the implication of this, and it was left to Essenhight to note it and to comment upon it by one of those extravagant but revealing passages which illuminate his Journal and himself. Crosse found that weak currents over comparatively long periods produced the best results—that is, the most *acari*; and he therefore ceased to use strong currents and thereby missed a more spectacular discovery, again leaving this to Essenhight.

"Crosse at one time and another invited well-known men of science, some of them Fellows of the Royal Society, to *Fyne Court* to witness his experiments; and all of them later gave testimony to their genuine nature and to the astonishing production of *acari*. And then Crosse decided to publish the results of these astounding experiments; did so; and was appalled at the storm which descended upon him. The Press, while editorially remaining sceptical or mildly hostile, opened their correspondence pages to a spate of the most vitupera-

tive and scurrilous letters that can ever have disgraced the columns of national newspapers. Nor were pulpit and platform idle. Atheist, liar, blasphemer, devil-worker, monster, God-murderer, fiend, were some of the epithets flung at him. A deeply religious and devout man, who devoted many hours to the composition of pious verses and hymns, he was staggered, overwhelmed, crushed, and bitterly wounded by these brutal and unenlightened attacks. He attempted a defence. He said he had never claimed to have created life, creation being the making of something from nothing, a power possessed only by God. All he claimed to have done, he said (pleaded would be the better word), was by electrical action to have produced artificial insects, the mite *Acarus Crossei* or *Acarus galvanicus*. He might have saved his breath. The storm of abuse redoubled; and before its fury, in sorrow and bitterness of spirit, he bowed his head and surrendered to the forces of darkness. For the remaining years of his life he gave himself up almost entirely to the composition of devotional verse, as if by so doing he might placate that God whom popular opinion shrieked he had outraged and tried to murder. And again it was left to Essenhigh to dissipate that black fog and make manifest the essential truth poor Crosse missed." Mark looked up from his pages and said, "Those are the main facts of Andrew Crosse's life and his experiments, and I now resume Essenhigh's story."

#### LUTHER ESSENHIGH'S STORY CONTINUED

The more I thought upon, brooded upon indeed, Andrew Crosse's experiments and their outcome the more I was aware, not only of what he had done (which was unprecedented, quasi-miraculous), but of what he had missed, which was so startling, so tremendous, so fraught with incredible possibilities for mankind, that even I drew back, pausing as it were upon the threshold of illimitable things, stupendous and frightening things. It was but the most momentary of pauses. This was the work for which I had been born; all my sufferings and unhappiness now showed as part of a pattern. I had had to endure them. It was an ordered part of my pilgrimage through the darkness. That was over now and the light lay

ahead; and beyond the light my magnificent, my predestined goal.

The path to that goal I now saw lying before me, dazzlingly illuminated, unswervingly straight. Beside that effulgent and shining road that which poor Crosse had trodden seemed but a winding muddy track across a bog amid a murky twilight. I realised that it was because of that dim light in which he worked and lived that Crosse had all along missed what came to me in flash after revealing flash, even while I read for the first time the account of his work. The implications he had missed! There were first the abrupt disappearance of the *acari* when reimmersed in the liquid from which they had been created. I felt sure I knew the whole truth of that. There was his abandonment of strong currents of electricity in favour of weak ones used over comparatively long periods. I saw what he had missed there as if it were written in letters of fire across the wall of my laboratory. But chieftest of all there was the appearance of the fungi upon the stick of charcoal. How had he come to miss all that that implied? He must have known that the great, the stupendous, moment upon this planet was not the first appearance of protoplasm; but æons and æons farther back when a brown fungus (the only form of life then in existence upon the world) began to make chlorophyll. From that moment began the whole cycle of life that over incalculable years and in incalculable measure has covered the earth. For until there was oxygen in the air no animal life was possible; and the air of prime contained no oxygen; it had to wait until chlorophyll appeared with its power of absorbing the carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, feeding the carbon to the plant, and giving the oxygen to the air. Crosse created a primitive fungus: he could not see that he had inadvertently put his foot upon a road which would have led him immensely farther than his mites, marvellous as these were. But saddest of all the blind spots in this great man was his bowing to the storm of abuse which his work brought upon him. Undoubtedly the epithet which hurt him most was atheist, for he was a deeply religious man. He must have believed in his heart that his experiments were destroying God, that he was in fact what that horde of illiterates yelped at him: God-murderer. But what was the truth? I have no re-

ligious beliefs myself, but Crosse, a devout man who believed in God as the creator of the universe, should have seen that what he was doing was to the glory of his God, since it meant that God now considered his highest creation Man sufficiently developed to be delegated the power of creation. When he pleaded that he had not created but merely produced he was, of course, juggling with words. The *Acarus galvanicus* was a true creation, if only a first step upon a road. Had Crosse faced that he might have walked that road to its magnificent goal. Instead he chose abnegation, and it was left to me, pre-destined to me, me the beaten, the derided, the humiliated, the contemned, to be the first real creator of life (for Crosse's mites were but brief ephemeral things, as I came to know) through the whole range and scale of Nature; and finally of man: for ultimately I would create man; not in the image of any God, but in a mould of my own imagination.

But I had to walk before I could run, and I proposed first to repeat Crosse's experiments to see what I could learn from them and in particular to satisfy myself as to the cause of the disappearance of the *acari* when reimmersed. I had no real doubts, but I wished for a demonstration.

There was much apparatus, largely electrical, to be bought and assembled; and as I did not want my affairs discussed in the town, I got the Thompson people and Rattray's, both of London, who supplied respectively the electrical equipment and the tanks and cisterns, to send their men down to do all the work. The men were to lodge at *Bevis Hall* and were not to go into the town, nor talk about their work with any tradesmen or other casual caller. In return they were to receive a generous bonus and for their entertainment there was plenty of refreshment; the radio; and my own private cinema. Seathorpe was, of course, vastly interested in the arrival of the men and the crates, boxes, and packing-cases; and Jackson told me that it was believed that the crates and cases contained pianos, radio sets, and organ parts. This suited me very well and, moreover, gave my thoughts a twist which resulted in the birth of my reputation locally as a great musician and composer. In the old and generally accepted sense of these two words I am nothing of the sort; but in the new sense, my sense, the sense that derives its reality from me and my work,

I am both a musician and a composer and far and away the greatest the world has yet produced. It would be well to dispose of this comparatively trifling matter before I pass on to my biological experiments and their results.

I was familiar with the melodic rod and the strange high-pitched notes which could be extracted from it, and I had installed several of them in the laboratory and in some of the other rooms. They were just playthings. One day during a storm I noticed that all my rods were emitting faint sweet notes, although they were all switched off. After various experiments, and using the thermionic valve in conjunction with the rods, I made vastly improved models which emitted a range of clear beautiful notes whenever there was any electricity present in the atmosphere, and which, during storms, after I had by a simple and original device eliminated crackle, quite flooded a small room with unearthly melody. But these were after all but trumpery things, and I was to do much better than that.

I had as part of the apparatus I needed in my biological experiments constructed a large singing arc, using twelve condensers in series, and I amused myself by playing tunes with it. But during a storm, when all my improved melodic rods were composing (let the word stand), I noticed that my singing arc, although the current was off, was emitting a faint very sweet series of notes: and in a flash I conceived the idea of combining my melodic rods with a more powerful singing arc. Thus was conceived what took final shape as my atmospheric electrical organ or ætherial harp as I named it. This instrument, unique in the world, composes and plays, during any condition of atmospheric electricity, that magnificent and incredible music which at some time or another has been heard by most of the people of Seathorpe, and which, I understand from Jackson, has won me no small local celebrity as a great if eccentric composer. Few reputations have ever been so merited, for I am, indirectly it is true, the greatest composer and musician of this or any other age. The music of my ætherial harp is the true and authentic music of the spheres: magnificent, unearthly, unbelievable. Never before has its like been heard. I have made many records of it, and these in the ripeness of time shall substantiate all my claims before the

whole world. But enough of my music, a trifling thing, as even the greatest music must be when life, living things, are put into the opposing balance. If art is long, life is eternal. Beside the creation of Crosse's mite all the music of Beethoven is but a whistling down the wind.

At first I duplicated Crosse's apparatus, varying my solutions as he did, and by May 1934 I was producing the *Acarus galvanicus* in large numbers and had already proved that my assumption of the cause of the disappearance of the *acari* on reimmersion was correct. Crosse was correct when he said the *acari* disappeared; correct when he said they died; but incorrect when he stated that their bodies were dissolved in the liquid. What happened was that at death (and the mites died easily) they disintegrated into the liquid from which they had been electrically created. I proved this by removing one of my *acari* from the tank, placing it on a watch-glass, and giving it a slight blow with a small metal rod. This was enough to kill it, and this precarious hold upon life, which was a characteristic of the *Acarus Crossei*, was one of my earliest obstacles. When I struck the *acarus* with the metal rod it instantaneously disintegrated into a drop of liquid from which I had created it, as I proved by analysis over and over again in many similar experiments. For I left nothing to chance. I was assiduous and painstaking to the last degree in every stage of experiment, even the simplest; for to this, my predestined work, I had wholly dedicated myself.

I was for some time puzzled by the frail hold on life possessed by these mites and the transience of their existence; from a few hours to at the most a few days; and I finally concluded, and rightly concluded, that the initial electrical force which created them was too weak to hold them together, keep them integrated, for long. The necessary remedial measures were obvious. I was also puzzled because my *acari* did not grow—most of them, that is. The few that did grow failed, except in one or two cases, to reach even the size of Crosse's 'small pea.' The remedy for this was not apparent and entailed many experiments before it was found.

By the early summer of 1935 I was producing *acari* of the size of cockroaches which grew to maturity in a few weeks and then were as big as newly born kittens. Not many, how-

ever, reached maturity and their hold on life was little greater than that of their prototype. Nevertheless, I was making progress, and all that summer I was in a state of almost continuous mental and emotional excitement, which must have been extremely good for me, for I had never known myself in better health. I ate with appetite whenever I happened to think of food; digested with comfort; and slept soundly each night for seven hours. Thus it is always, I believe, when a man is doing his appointed work in the world and knows that he is doing it well.

It was during this summer, while I was working on these larger and tougher *acari*, that I had a blinding flash of inspiration and knew that I had hit upon the origin of life on this planet; and upon a myriad others, for the view that this planet is the only one which supports life is too ludicrous to discuss. I knew, as if I had been present at that great moment in time (but not the greatest), that life had been created by an electrical disturbance in the shallows of a primordial sea. It was the action of electricity on submerged or partially submerged decaying beds of primitive sea plants which had produced protoplasm, either by a long-continued steady current from the earth, set up between opposing strata of different rocks; or by a lightning flash.

I was for a while dazzled by this revelation, and while not neglecting my work on the *acari* I set myself to create protoplasm by duplicating the conditions which had brought about its first creation. I had several thousand gallons of sea water delivered to me and made as many as forty or fifty experiments, varying the electrical action, and making use of a thirty-inch spark for artificial lightning. All these experiments were abortive. Something was missing; something lacked; something was wrong. It was not my hypothesis; of that I was certain. What, then? The answer came to me in a flash of intuition as revelatory and as dazzling as that of the hypothesis: the composition of the primordial sea water, like that of the primordial atmosphere, was very different from the sea water of historical times. It would, I computed, contain much less sodium chloride; considerably less calcium, potassium, and magnesium chlorides; and much more helium, calcium sulphate, and calcium carbonate. It was a simple matter to

make artificial sea water of such a composition; and with this I recommenced my experiments; and in the late autumn of 1935 I succeeded in creating protoplasm, the first specks appearing in my tank at 11.35 p.m. on the seventeenth of November.

I had begun. Artificial life had begun. Man as a creator of life was launched upon a road of illimitable vistas.

On January the tenth of the following year I found at the end of an experiment with protoplasm a small crustacean (brown and about the size of a pea) crawling on the bottom of the tank. It was crablike, but not a true crab, unless of some extinct species. The carapace was very long and narrow, the two claws disproportionately enormous and one much larger than the other; the eight legs short and sturdy with only two joints. It grew with astonishing and almost frightening speed, ate voraciously, and by the end of the month was as large as my fist. It was strong, speedy, and tough; its hold on life immeasurably greater than that of any of the *acari* I had till then produced.

This was a tremendous stride forward. It was my first achievement entirely free of Crosse's leading strings, for with the *acari* I was merely following in his footprints, and even the protoplasm owed something to that experiment of his when he grew fungi on a charcoal rod and missed the implication (which I immediately grasped) that what elements in Nature had produced first fungi and then protoplasm would do so artificially.

All through 1936 I continued to produce my *acari* and my crustaceans, although to no great size. My largest *acari* were about the size of a rabbit; my crustaceans slightly larger. Both creatures were amphibious, and as my productiveness increased I was faced with the necessity of either releasing my creations from the laboratory into the outside world or destroying them. I was reluctant to kill them, an understandable emotion; I was still more reluctant to allow them to wander about the countryside until they died or were killed or captured. The world, I felt, was not yet ready for my secret, even if I had been ready to disclose it. And so with an extraordinary feeling of horror plucking at my heart (as if I were killing my own children) I destroyed them. It was easy with the

*acari*, too easy; their hold on life was almost as frail as ever. But with the crustaceans it was a horrible business; they crouched desperately in corners, emitting their characteristic-fetid smell, their great eyes glaring at me in fear and hate, one tremendous claw flailing at me for a hold, the other stabbing and snatching. But while the *acari* disintegrated into the liquid from which they had been created (a characteristic I was never able to overcome), the crustaceans left behind their battered bodies, and these I secretly burnt in my electric furnace. Jackson rarely entered the laboratory and then only in my company, and I was quite sure he was completely ignorant of what was happening almost under his nose. He was, I assumed, the sort of dull, lethargic, incurious person who is not greatly interested in anything outside his immediate personal needs.

I am not a superstitious man, but I have my weaknesses, my little foibles, and one of these is a quite grotesque and illogical feeling that numbers exercise an influence on human lives. My reasoning mind told me this was bosh, but the imaginative mind, which derives from the primitive, whispered to me (it was no more than a whisper) that there was something in it. And I half listened and half believed. And the 'something,' as far as it concerned me, was that the number seven was important in my life: was a powerful influence in shaping my destiny: was, as the astrological charlatans say, my lucky number. And so I expected 1937 to be a year of great achievement. I was not disappointed.

During February I produced my first giant *acarus*. It was as large as a half-grown sow, but weighed only forty pounds and lived a mere twenty-four hours after reaching maturity. During the same month I produced my first giant crustaceans, two of them, both males; and tremendous, ferocious, and formidable fellows these were, in size no larger than my giant *acarus*, but weighing over a hundredweight apiece and putting up a terrific fight when I finally forced myself to kill them.

I was, I realised, approaching a crisis in my experiments. I could not go on creating these creatures merely to kill them. I was reaching a condition of mind where I could no longer kill them; I could not bear the emotional stress and turmoil. But I was not yet ready to proceed to other and higher

creatures, for I had yet much to learn from both the *acari* and the crabs; and in particular I wanted to produce giant *acari* whose resistance to injury and to disintegration was greater than anything I had yet achieved. Having reached my crisis, I faced it. I would no longer destroy my creations; and as I could not harbour them, I would give them their liberty, release them into the outside world and let them shift for themselves. Beyond that point I did not let my mind wander. I did not anticipate any trouble or danger to the neighbourhood from them; but I did not bother. What people would make of them, if one or more were captured, did not bother me either. I thought their capture unlikely, especially as I proposed to release them only at night; but I did not really care. These matters seemed but trifles, mere eddies in the main stream of my work.

By the late summer of 1937 I decided to release the first giant *acarus*. I had profited by my failures, and the creature was, I believed, of much tougher fibre than his predecessors, as it was considerably larger and heavier, weighing about seventy pounds. There was a door at the end of the laboratory which led into the kitchen garden, thence to the west lawn, and from there to the drive and the great gates, which were never closed. I fixed upon the night of August 9 for the first release, the hour to be just before midnight, when Jackson would have been long abed and asleep.

I could not but feel as the hour approached that this was a tremendous moment in the history of the world, and if not comparable to the first appearance of chlorophyll, the first appearance in Nature of protoplasm, Crosse's first mite, or my own first crustacean, it was not without its peculiar claim to commemoration.

And at ten minutes before midnight I opened the door and shepherded the great creature (ugly, ungainly, and repulsive, but not to me, who found its very hideousness beautiful), the great, harmless creature (for it was as harmless as a ball of wool), out of the laboratory and into the kitchen garden. It moved fairly quickly, and I followed it, torch in hand. It came in a minute or so to a path, crossed it, stumbled against the fence, and instead of turning and continuing along the path tried to climb the fence, fell back, and incontinently disinte-

grated, leaving nothing but a large pool, which quickly soaked away.

All my tanks were occupied by *acari* and crabs in various stages of growth; and it was not until the night of August 15 that I released another *acarus*, with little more success, for the creature, after an hour's wandering, reached the great gates at the end of the drive, but instead of passing through them climbed one of the gates, reached the top, poised precariously for a moment, looking in the darkness like some monstrous toad; and then crashed to the ground and disintegrated into a pool. It was clear that besides the handicap of their fragility these creatures were stupid. My crabs were neither fragile nor stupid; far from it; they were formidably tough and possessed of a ferocious cunning. But I was not yet ready to give any of them their freedom. I waited another week before trying again, and on the night of Monday, August 22, I released my third giant *acarus*, and had the satisfaction of seeing it, after many meanderings and balks, pass through the gates and set off across a field path. As it disappeared into the darkness, familiar as it was to my eyes, I found that quick-moving, lumbering shape incredible; it might have been a creature of nightmare or a grotesque saurian from some primordial swamp. I had thought of following it and seeing what happened to it, but I did not want to be met by anyone at that hour, and in any case I could not have kept up with it even at a fast run, for I judged its speed as quite fifteen miles an hour. I thought that Jackson during his shopping the next day would hear something about that uncanny intruder into Seathorpe's sleeping streets; but if he did hear he said nothing to me.

I might have questioned him, but I refrained. I was, in fact, by this time by no means easy in my mind about Jackson. He was acting strangely, abnormally. He began to pray aloud as he went about his duties; and more than once I had entered a room during the daytime to find him on his knees. He had never been talkative, but now he was becoming so taciturn that for days on end no words passed between us beyond those necessitated by his duties or my requirements. On one occasion, it was several days after the first successful dispatch of an *acarus*, being inside a room with Jackson doing

something in the corridor without, I heard his voice very loudly, and, going out, asked him what he wanted. He said morosely, his glance darting away from me and one hand at his mouth, that he wanted nothing; and when I said I thought he had called me he gnawed at his nails, shot me a swift sidelong look, and said that he was talking to God.

And abruptly I realised, perhaps I saw it in that swift look, that he knew of my experiments, knew at least something of them; and that he regarded them with a violent emotion which I found myself unable clearly to interpret as either abhorrence, superstition, or terror. Perhaps it was something of all three. But, foolishly perhaps, I did not consider the matter of any importance, dismissed it from my mind, and forgot about it in the now rapidly increasing interest and excitement of my work.

On the night of Friday, August 27, I again released an *acarus*, and again had the satisfaction of seeing it set off at a swift pace into Seathorpe—a pace, it seemed to me, much faster than its predecessors. I was careful to give Jackson plenty of commissions to execute for me in the town the next day; but once more either he heard nothing or he kept it to himself.

On the night of September 1 I released my third *acarus* and the following night my fourth; but again Jackson remained dumb. I began to be exasperated at this silence and to curse my dependence on this morose, shambling great lout for news. For I badly wanted news of my *acari*. For a while I played with the idea of going into the town myself; but I abandoned it in view of the fact that I had not been seen there for over three years, and I particularly wished to avoid attracting attention to myself at this juncture.

However, I was misjudging Jackson. He had told me nothing because he had heard nothing. On the nights of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, September 6, 7, and 8, I released three more *acari*; and got some news of them, Jackson reporting that there was some commotion in the town over queer tracks which had been found in the sands by the coastguard coming off night patrol.

The news excited me tremendously, and I wondered if there had been previous happenings about which Jackson

had not heard; and I suggested to him that he might make enquiries. His reply astonished me, for, despite his moroseness and taciturnity, he had always been respectful and obliging. Nor could I interpret the quick shifty look he gave me with his reply. "I dare say," he said, omitting the customary 'sir,' "that lots o' things happen in Seathorpe I don't hear about and don't want to hear about." He took a quick nibble at his nails, and added, "and I'm not fond o' gossiping."

I had to satisfy myself by guesswork and deduction. It seemed fairly obvious that the first four *acari* had met with some accident and disintegrated, and the liquid left behind had soaked away, or, if remaining as a puddle, had not been noticed. But when it came to the case of the three *acari* which had left those tracks upon the sand (for I had not any doubt it was they) I was left wondering whether they had entered the sea and what their ultimate fate had been.

I was sure now that my latest giant *acari* were considerably tougher specimens than my earlier ones, and this I thought might possibly be due to the stimulation of a stronger current of electricity to which I had subjected them for twenty-four hours before their release. I therefore, before releasing any more, subjected them to this vitalising stimulation for a period of a week; and on September 27, as early as nine in the evening, I released what I hoped would be a stronger and more permanent specimen. Of what happened to this creature Jackson, to my intense disappointment, brought me no news. Two evenings later I released another; and again had no news from Jackson of any talk in the town. Nor had I any better result from the *acarus* I released on the night of Friday the first of October. I controlled my impatience and my temper, and the following night released another.

Ever since Jackson had been with me he had attended both morning and evening service at his Baptist Tabernacle, and despite his pretence that he was not fond of gossiping he indulged in that Sabbath-day amenity with as much zest as most people; and it was from this Sunday gossip that I had in the past been kept in touch with the affairs of the town. The local paper, a garbage tin, I refused to have in the house. The vicar of St. John's had paid me one call, but I had not encouraged him to repeat his visit. This I was inclined later to

regret, for a vicarage is a very hot-bed and forcing-house for gossip, and I confess that I have always found gossip of the malicious and scandalous sort one of the minor pleasures of life.

It was therefore with some confidence, if impatience, that I awaited Jackson's return from chapel that evening. Something must have happened to the four *acari* I had released since the Monday, and I very much wanted to hear what. But on his return he volunteered no information, which so exasperated me that I asked him if nothing had been happening in Seathorpe during the week.

"Nothing I know of," he said surlily.

Convinced that he was lying, I was about to probe him when he said in an extraordinary tense voice, "I suppose you're wanting to hear about your devil's work?" He did not wait for me to speak, but went on, the words coming out now in a torrent, "You think I don't know what you're doing, but I do know; I know all about it; I know what black work's going on in the laboratory."

He is a big, strong fellow and he was now a truly menacing spectacle, his face working, his eyes glaring, and his hands opening and shutting spasmodically. I did not feel afraid of him, and I thought it as well to show that I was not to be intimidated by his rudeness and violent speech. "Indeed," I said, "and what am I doing?"

"Devil's work," he said; "you're trafficking with Satan." Little bubbles of saliva began to gather at the corners of his mouth. "I know. I've seen things. Horrible things. Devil's things. I've seen them crawling across the gardens, running along the paths. I know what you're doing. I've seen them."

"In that case," I said contemptuously, "it's a pity you didn't follow them and find out what happened to them. Perhaps next time you'll be good enough to do so. You needn't be afraid. They won't hurt you."

"I'm not afraid. They can't hurt me." And then his tone changed, his tension relaxed, his whole attitude became different. As if he had completely forgotten his fury of a moment ago, he bent his head towards me and said softly, "Angels protect me."

I realised with what I had to deal and said quietly, "That must be very comforting."

"It is a great honour," he said; "God has chosen me for this honour. Michael told me."

"Michael?" I said, off my guard for a moment.

But he failed to note whatever amusement there may have been in my tone and went on equably, "The Archangel Michael. He often talks with me. And Gabriel and Raphael too."

"What do you talk about?"

Instantly his manner changed and he shot me a sidelong look and bit at his nails. "You know," he said; "you know." And then, with an extraordinary intensity of passion in his voice, he hurried on: "Take warning. You do not know what you are doing. You are doing Satan's work. God is warning you." And with another darting glance and an ophidian-like thrust of his head towards me he turned away and went out of the room.

I was not unduly perturbed. I knew where I was with him, and that was better than being in the dark. Religious mania was pathetic and could be a nuisance, but, unlike sexual mania, I had never heard of its being dangerous. It would be best to get rid of Jackson, but there was, I felt, no immediate hurry. He was a good servant and knew my ways, and it would not be easy to replace him quickly. I did not want just then to be bothered with the task of replacing him. I was too busy.

I sent out no more *acari* for a week, but spent most of my time in the laboratory experimenting with various foods and with varying intensities of current in my search for body builders and stimulants. The largest of my *acari* were now the size of a fully grown sow and weighed over eighty pounds, while my largest crabs were nearly as big and over twice as heavy. Accommodation was becoming insufficient, and several mornings I entered the laboratory to find that some of the *acari* and crabs had managed to get out of their tanks and engage in mortal combat, as the state of the floor witnessed. Combat is hardly the word, the engagement being in the nature of a massacre. One morning as I entered a crab scuttled towards me in the faint light, one gigantic claw

lunging towards me menacingly. I fortunately did the right thing, switched on all the lights, and the crab hurried away to find some protecting shade; for both the *acari* and the crustaceans were nocturnal creatures and found distressing any other light but the dim one of the laboratory during the night hours. When the laboratory lights were up they remained submerged in their tanks and mostly almost motionless, as if asleep. All the tanks had covers, which I often left half-on all day, to the apparent great content of the inmates. The formidable size, the ferocity, and the voracity of my crabs was, I admit, beginning to occasion me some uneasiness; but my preliminary investigations and experiments were now drawing to an end, and I felt sure that I should soon be able to dispense with the services of these relatively simple structures and to proceed much farther along the road of creation. Indeed, in my more intuitive, my more inspired moods, I felt, I knew, that I was almost ready to advance straight towards my goal: the creation of man—not *Homo sapiens* in the image of God, but *Homo gigas*, *Homo splendidus* in the mould of my imagination.

On the nights of October the eleventh, thirteenth, and fourteenth I released the three largest of my *acari* and awaited with impatience Jackson's return from chapel on the Sunday. Surely the irruption of three such monsters into Seathorpe could not have passed unnoticed, and Jackson's love of gossip and carrying news might prove stronger than his mania: might they not even become allies as a means of persuading me to abandon my association with the Devil?

Jackson had heard something and he was not unwilling to communicate it. It appeared that he was, as he put it, acquainted with one of the maids of a Mrs. Leveson. He told me this with a half-sheepish air, and I gathered that it was, at least in his intention, something more than an acquaintance-ship; and the mental picture of this big, shambling, saturnine, morose fellow in the rôle of a lover was so grotesque that I restrained a smile with difficulty, and was rewarded, for he told me not only of the death of Mrs. Leveson's lap-dog, but of several suffocated cats, including a drenched one. I did not pass any comment upon these stories or ask any questions (I did not need to), for I did not want to provoke him into

another outburst; but as soon as we had supped and I had told him to go to bed as I should not need him any more that night, I retired into the laboratory, and just after nine-thirty released the finest *acarus* I had yet produced. I had to wait a week before I heard anything, but it was not the news, when it came, which decided me to cease my experiments with *acari*, for I had already made up my mind to that; to produce no more of these clumsy, stupid, and structurally simple creatures; to destroy those still in my tanks; and to begin the release of my crustaceans.

That *acarus* was, in fact, the last one I released, and while waiting during that week for news of it the laboratory was the scene of an encounter which might have been much more serious than it actually was. After my scare with the crab I had increased the lighting in the laboratory at night during my absence, not to a degree of brilliance which might adversely affect the health of my creatures, but enough to discourage them from leaving the tanks. I underestimated their vitality and their predatory urge, and on the Tuesday night three of the biggest of them emerged from their tanks and engaged in a battle-royal of such violence that none survived. It must have been an uncanny spectacle in the half-light of the laboratory, darkened with the loom of my strange machines and these three primitive monsters, stalked by their grotesque shadows, creeping upon one another, their great eyes glaring, their tremendous claws clashing as they sought for a hold. In the morning when I opened the laboratory an overpowering fetid stench drove me backwards, and in my perturbation I advanced through the door without closing it behind me. It must have been several minutes before I remembered and hurried back to remedy my forgetfulness.

It was a pardonable forgetfulness. The mess on the floor was indescribable. My crabs were in every way of tougher fibre than the *acari*, and they had not the mites' ineradicable tendency to disintegrate; but at death they corrupted with startling and quite horrifying speed, so that what confronted me that morning was a mass of stinking corruption, colloidal and green. The stench filled my lungs and turned my stomach until I was near to vomiting; but I was partly invulnerable to such an olfactory assault, for all my crabs when alive carried

about with them a fetid smell and the laboratory was never entirely free from it.

Jackson had no such protective armour. The stench seeped into the house and permeated every corner. It contaminated all the food and made it uneatable. It made Jackson so ill that after several bouts of violent vomiting that morning and afternoon I sent him to bed; and there he stayed for two days and nights, refusing to eat and drinking only water. If he slept it must have been very little, for whenever I woke during the night, or went near his room during the day, he was loudly praying and talking with his angels. His voice seemed to follow me everywhere. It began to haunt me. Even in the laboratory with all the doors closed and the steel shutters down I seemed to hear him. But it was only seeming. I knew that, and it rather frightened me. I of all men must not allow such fancies to creep into my mind. Nor those other fancies which would intrude while I worked; macabre images of that monstrous struggle pursued one another through my mind and would not for all my will submit to complete exclusion. And ever and again, although the lights were on in all their dazzling brilliance, I found myself starting and peering suddenly over my shoulder. Even the familiar shadows of my machines seemed to take on strange menacing shapes. Seemed to. It was, I knew, only seeming, but there was no comfort for me in that thought.

But by the week-end I was myself again, impatient to hear whatever news there might be and inclined to curse my refusal to harbour Mr. Mervyn Clarke's garbage can, a refusal hurting no one but myself. Fortunately, Jackson too had completely recovered, and on Sunday went to morning and evening service at his chapel. For the first time since he had been with me he did not return to the *Hall* after the morning service; but this neither disturbed nor incommoded me, as mealtimes were such irregular and movable feasts that I frequently went for days without cooked food, preferring to make shift with anything cold that could be quickly prepared rather than tie myself down to fixed hours. Often when I was engrossed in my work I ate nothing all day until I had finished, which was not rarely late in the evening. There were other times when I ate frequently and much and with a

hearty appetite. Nor did my health suffer in the least. People fuss too much about meals and their digestions. The rule I follow is to eat only when hunger makes itself a nuisance, and then I eat anything I fancy and as much as I like. And so, as I say, Jackson's absence did not incommod me. I had something out of a tin and a half-bottle of Volnay 1929. I thought that perhaps his affair with the girl was going well and that he had been invited to dinner in the kitchen. Nor did I bother when he did not put in an appearance during the afternoon or early evening. In fact, I forgot all about him, and it was not until half-past nine that, feeling suddenly hungry, I knocked off my work in the laboratory, locked up, and went into the house to get something to eat.

Suddenly I heard Jackson and thought he was calling to me; but as I listened I caught the strange, monotonous, almost mechanical praying note in his voice, and with a faint shrug of my shoulders I went on with my meal. It was rather annoying, for I had hoped to get some news out of him; but perhaps he would be more ready for an earthly auditor by the morning. But I had not to wait for the morning.

He came in suddenly without knocking or any other warning; but I refrained from reproofing him. His face was pale and drawn, the muscles about the mouth twitching. He pointed at me and said, "Herod."

"Don't talk like a melodramatic fool," I said sharply. "What's it all about? Sit down and tell me."

My tone quieted him, but he did not sit down and stood a little behind my chair, a position which made me rather uneasy; and so I turned to half face him. "Well," I said, "what is it?"

He told me that the Jenkins's baby had been found suffocated the previous Sunday; and as he finished he began to be agitated again and his face to twitch. "Devil's work," he said; "devil's work; murdering devils."

I thought it best to calm him, and said, "Accidents will happen; but there'll be no more."

He shot me a glance, his hand at his mouth. "What do you mean?" he said. He no longer addressed me as 'sir' at any time, and I did not think it worth while to call his attention to the omission. I intended to dismiss him as soon as

I could give my mind to the irritating business of replacing him.

"I simply mean," I said, not altogether truthfully, "that I have other things to do."

This seemed to satisfy him, and, muttering something I could not catch, he went out as abruptly as he had entered.

Two days later (that is, on the night of Tuesday, October 26) I made my first release of a crab, which I expected to be a hazardous undertaking, and which for some moments it threatened to be; but I found my torch (a very powerful one) an invaluable weapon, the creature cowering away from its dazzle, and I was able to manœuvre it through the end door without much difficulty. I had meant to follow it, but it scuttled off into the darkness with such astonishing speed that I did not even attempt pursuit. Instead I shone the torch on its disappearing figure, and could not repress a faint shudder of repulsion and horror, so grotesquely hideous, so monstrously unnatural, the creature looked as it swayed and lumbered along, its distorted shadow beside it. A clashing noise proceeded from it and a fetid smell drifted over to me on the fresh air of the garden.

On the following night I released one and the next night three; but it was not until Jackson returned from chapel on the Sunday evening that I learned of the depredations of these creatures. Jackson's tone and manner were quiet as he related the incidents of the sheep, the dog, and the poultry. I thought it more than mere quietness. It seemed to me that he was striving to keep himself under control; that he was on guard. I admit to feeling a slight uneasiness, and his news, if anything, added to that feeling. The accidental death of the Jenkins's baby and the deliberate killing of sheep were, I was acutely conscious, poles apart. The *acari* were, after all, one of the lowest forms of life, but little above sea anemones, and definitely below true insects; but my crabs were creatures comparatively high up in the scale of life. There was pride in this thought and infinite promise; but there was, too, cause for uneasiness. What mischief might not these ferocious and voracious animals do? I would produce no more. They were no longer necessary to me. I was ready to stride ahead, my goal already in sight. But I proposed to release at intervals

those I had made (twelve in all, including those already released), as I was anxious to gather a little more information about their reactions to a natural as opposed to an artificial environment; and I especially wanted to learn whether or not they were drawn to the sea. These releases would probably involve the death of a number of domesticated animals, but this could not be avoided. I did not think there was any great risk to human life. But even if there were I was resolved to take it. It was unthinkable that such work as mine should be held up by such comparatively trivial obstacles.

Between Sunday, October 31, and Sunday, November 7, I released but two of my crabs, and these were unhappily responsible for the attacks upon the half-wit Jaunty Muir and the little girl Tessie Mayhew, about which I learnt from Jackson, who, to my surprise, told me of the incidents in a quiet, matter-of-fact, almost casual tone. I should have felt easier in my mind if he had delivered one of his insane tirades.

I had, however, to listen to one of these not later than the following day, although the subject was neither Muir nor the little girl, but himself. The crab I released on that Sunday night found its way into the house, into Jackson's bedroom, and, according to his story (whose accuracy, being in the laboratory all night, I was unable to check), pursued him for nearly half an hour all over the house. He told me this no doubt greatly exaggerated story when I went to his room in the middle of the morning on Monday to find out why he was not up. He said he was too ill to get up; accused me of lying and breaking my word; and wound up by threatening to go to the police if I did not at once stop my devil's work.

I told him the truth: that I had stopped it. But I did not tell him that for the next week or so there might be more unpleasant incidents. He stayed in bed until the afternoon of Tuesday, drinking only water, refusing all food, praying loudly and talking to his angels.

That Tuesday night I released two; and then for a fortnight sent out no more; for on Wednesday I had a violent gastric and intestinal upset with vomiting and diarrhoea, which did not respond to treatment for nearly a week, during all of which I remained in bed and, owing to weakness, most

of the following week too. The first day I was able to return to my laboratory I released a crab (it was a Saturday night), and the next day I waited impatiently for Jackson's return from chapel.

He had a distressing tale to tell; more than one, in fact, for besides the disappearance of the boy Brading there was the strange woman who had been killed on the night of Sir Jack Borlase's death.

And as he told them his manner was agitated, his face twitching, his voice hysterical; and at the end he broke into vituperation and threats. He said I was a murderer, and over and over again declared his intention of going to the police on the morrow.

But on the morrow we were both down with influenza and I spent a nightmare week; for I had to look after both of us. We ran very high temperatures and had frequent bouts of delirium. I would emerge from some hideous dream to lie and listen to his ramblings and ravings. When he was not delirious he prayed aloud or talked with the angels, and often I heard my name mentioned. Much of the time I was uncertain what was happening. I frequently dreamed that I was in my laboratory at work, and when I woke I could not shake off the feeling that I had been in the laboratory. Perhaps I had. Sometimes these dreams of working passed into horrifying nightmares in which the most appalling creatures, like and yet unlike the *acari* and the crabs, pursued me interminably or advanced upon me whilst I cowered away, but could not move.

That week will always remain in my memory as a nightmare. On my last day in bed, feeling better but incredibly weak, I gave much thought to my future plans. I would make an end at once of my crabs. I knew all I wanted to know and might now set about with complete confidence the necessary preliminaries to the work preordained for me to do; to the fulfilment of my destiny.

Man, *Homo sapiens*, as evolved by Nature, is, zoologically considered, a failure. So physically insignificant that in order to be imposing he has to deck himself in magnificent uniforms and put golden and jewelled gauds upon his ludicrously small head; his organism is so ill-adapted to its environment, his

digestive, respiratory, excretory, and reproductive systems so ill-constructed, that millions of his species die at birth, more before reaching maturity, and few attain a bare century of years; while even this brief lifetime is rendered a torment by a succession of ailments and diseases which affect him, from the hideous struggles of parturition to the dreadful convulsions of death. And all through life his physical body is harassed, his emotions racked, his mentality debilitated, by the overriding demands of sex.

I proposed to change all that. In the main my mould was already fashioned. Profiting by indifferent Nature's mistakes, I should create a being, *Homo splendidus*, who would be worthy of his destiny; that destiny which I foresaw not confined to this planet or system, but reaching out to the uttermost stars. Physically *Homo splendidus* will be a giant. Goliath, whom David slew, was in height six cubits and a span. According as to whether the cubit is reckoned as eighteen or twenty-two inches (and both are correct) this gives his height either as eleven feet nine inches or nine feet nine inches. The former height is considered the extreme limit possible to *Homo sapiens*, and this is doubtless true, owing to the fragility of his bony framework. But such a height is dwarfish, even by Nature's standards; and future man, *Homo splendidus*, should achieve at least forty feet at maturity. The head will be proportionately much larger and more magnificent than in *Homo sapiens*, and the brain incomparably greater and more complex, as indeed it must be if all space is to be subject to its owner. As the brain will be more complex, so the respiratory, excretory, and digestive systems will be more simple, especially the last, whose many crudities in *Homo sapiens* are the cause of most of the diseases which torture him. Such a simplification might well make digestion complete and perfect, thus rendering unnecessary an excretory system. But it is in respect of reproductive processes that *Homo splendidus* will differ most widely from *Homo sapiens*. The sex life of man as evolved by Nature dooms him for ever to remain among the beasts. It is an obsession from adolescence until death. It tortures him, humiliates him, degrades him, nullifies the possibilities of his brain, saps his vitality, infests him with the grossest superstitions, and compels him to actions from which

in recollection he recoils in disgust and repulsion. These things must pass away if man is to fulfil his destiny. I have given great and deep thought to the sexual processes of *Homo splendidus*, and at present I incline to that beautiful method of budding which Nature thought of, tried, and then unaccountably abandoned, except for the lowest forms of life. But these matters and a hundred others I shall settle in due course.

On the morning of Saturday, November 26, I felt well enough, although still weak, to resume my work in the laboratory. Jackson, by my advice, decided to stay in bed over the week-end. When I opened the laboratory door shortly after nine o'clock after a week's absence I was confronted by a situation with which I felt in my devitalised condition completely unable to cope. My remaining four crustaceans were at large and were apparently engaged in stalking one another. They were scuttling about swiftly with a great clashing of claws, and the air was heavy with their characteristic fetid smell. I had already decided to end their lives, to kill them in their tanks by passing a low-frequency current into the liquid. But this was something I had not bargained for, and in my weak state I simply could not face it. I came out and closed the door; and then, going round to the small door at the end of the laboratory, I opened it, fastened it back, and returned to bed, feeling weak, depressed, and physically wretched. I did not get up until shortly after seven on Monday, and then, having breakfasted and taken some bread and milk in to Jackson, who was praying with loud fervour and took no notice of me, I went over to the laboratory.

Mark put down the typescript and said: "That is Essenhigh's story. The rest is conjecture." And he then passed round the drawings and photographs. Presently Madderson said, looking from Mark to Dr. Heldar, "Are we allowed to conjecture why Jackson has been arrested for murder?"

Heldar seemed to hesitate for a moment and then he said, "Since Ferris was willing to allow you to hear Essenhigh's story, I don't imagine he would object to your hearing what little else is known. Jackson will be charged with murder on the evidence of Essenhigh's Journal; on the fact that Essenhigh's body and face bore some, although not any consider-

able, marks of violence; and finally because, although Jackson denies that he entered the laboratory, there is photographic evidence that he was in and out several times on the morning of Essenhigh's death. His statement that Essenhigh was in the laboratory from ten the previous evening is probably a lie."

"What photographic evidence, Father?" Lesley asked.

"There was a hidden camera just inside the door of the laboratory," Dr. Heldar replied, "and the shutter was operated when an infra-red, or invisible, ray was broken by anyone crossing it. Both Essenhigh and Jackson crossed the ray several times that morning, the camera photographed them, and the evidence is plain for anyone to see. Ferris says it is evidence which, if Jackson persists in his story, will undoubtedly hang him."

### *Chapter Fifteen*

#### MAINLY ABOUT PEOPLE

BUT Superintendent Ferris was wrong. Jackson was committed for trial at the winter assizes held at Ipswich. The case came on in January and lasted only three days, from the Tuesday to the Thursday. Despite the irrefutable evidence of the photographs taken by the camera at the door of the laboratory, Jackson persisted in the story he had told Ferris; and was acquitted. The judge commented ironically: 'That is *your* verdict, gentlemen.'

The case had excited tremendous interest throughout the country (and indeed the world), and it was front-page news everywhere. The verdict was generally received with astonishment, but apparently with considerable satisfaction. Dr. Heldar was perhaps near the truth when he said, in a talk he had with Mark on the evening of the day the trial ended: "It is pretty certain that Jackson killed Essenhigh; and everybody knows it. The Crown would have obtained a verdict had the charge been manslaughter, and Jackson would then have had the advantage of being under surveillance for three or four

years and a cure effected. He is obviously a religious maniac and may become a homicidal one now he's had his taste of blood. To charge him with murder was to ensure his acquittal, for no jury would hang a man for killing an atheist, and especially an atheist with the blood of two children on his hands. No; the verdict was a foregone conclusion. To the public Essenhight is an atheist, a monster, and a biologist: in that order. The cry of atheist! blasphemer! ended the life of Andrew Crosse (I mean as a man of science). It has saved Jackson's."

It was a fresh sunny morning two months later. Mark had been expecting Tom Palmer at his usual time and had gone into the garden to discuss with him the coming season; but the gardener had not put in an appearance, and it was nearly eleven o'clock before he arrived and Mark went out to see him.

"We're all in a dither up home," Palmer said; "all up at Harwich."

"Why, what's the trouble?" Mark said.

"No trouble. We're emigrating."

"Emigrating! Rather sudden, isn't it?"

"Well, it is and it isn't. I been wanting to emigrate for a long while. America."

"You think you'll like the New World better than the Old?"

"Sure of it. The Old's washed up anyway. Too many titles. Too many privileges. Too much born this and born that. Too medeeval. Too feudal. Lord This, Prince That, Lady Whass-name, and Duke o' T'Other."

Mark laughed. "And in America you've tycoons, financial magnates, trust bosses, and what not. Are you sure it's not a case of New Presbyter is Old Priest writ large?"

Palmer wrinkled his brows. "Coming up?" he said; and then, with a grin, "but I get you." He accepted Mark's pouch, filled and lit his pipe, and then said: "Dare say there's something in that, human nature being what it is; but there's more in it than that. My brother's a truck driver in New York. Been out there thirty years. Gets hundred dollars a week. Has done for years. That's over twenty pounds."

"And he pays twelve pounds for a suit of clothes," Mark smiled.

"Sure he does. And how often does a man want a suit o' clothes? He lives in a flat. Four rooms. Electric gadgets to do everything. Runs his own car. Two children. Both worked their way through college, and the boy's just passed out as a doctor and the girl as a high-school teacher. And never cost my brother a brown. Could a truck driver do that in this country? And could his kids? I ask you. Or a miner or a bricky or a mechanic or a poor perishing merchant seaman? Don't make me laugh. No. Europe's washed up. The rich are too greedy and the poor too weak. Always have been. Always will be. No idea of a square deal. It's different over there. And you know it is, tycoons or no blinking tycoons. I've always wanted to emigrate and so has the missis. Bert's letters used to fair make our mouths water. But we'd never the chink, and I wouldn't take it from Bert. Poor but proud. Wrote me three munce ago he was opening a garage and asked me to come in. Me! Nothing in the bank and about fourpence in the old tea-caddy. And then last week the missis's uncle dies and leaves her five hundred of the best, and I cables Bert and asks could we come out and I'd put the dough in the garage business. He cables yesterday, *Boy this is fine come right along*, and now you can't see the missis up home for dust. And in about a week you won't be able to see *neither* on us for dust; we'll be beating it so fast." He paused, sucked hard at his pipe, and then a slow grin spread itself over his face. "There's lots o' people in this dump," he said, pointing with his pipe-stem to the straggle of Seathorpe's houses, "who look down their smellers at the likes o' me. And there's a blinking lot too who say things; if you know what I mean. Hint. About me. Tom Palmer, they say, and wring their gobs about. Knocking things off. And I don't say I haven't. It's a way you get into in the merchant service. If *you* don't somebody else will. But 'ere." He took his pipe from his mouth and with a half-grin said, "I've never knocked nothing off o' yours, and here's my duke on it," and he held out his hand.

Two publishers' advertisements from *The Times Literary Supplement* of Saturday, July 9, 1938:

From Messrs. Brown and Thornton's list:

*The Soul of a Snob*  
A Biography of Robert Bloomfield  
By  
Mark Passmore

With a frontispiece and fifty illustrations in the text by  
Eliot Madderson ('Madd').

From Messrs. John Brearley's list:

*The Seathorpe Miracles*  
Full story of the astonishing creations of the  
late Luther Essenhight.  
By  
Mark Passmore

With many photographs and drawings.

Advertisement from *The Times* of Friday, July 15, 1938:

#### BIRTHS

BORLASE.—To Amy, widow of the late Sir Jack Borlase, Bart.,  
of *Freyne Court*, Seathorpe, Norfolk, a son (Jack).

#### MARRIAGES

PASSMORE-HELDAR.—At St. John's Church, Seathorpe, Norfolk, Mark Passmore, son of Captain Warren Passmore of *Southways*, Breford, Sussex, to Lesley, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Heldar of *The Elms*, Seathorpe, Norfolk.



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